



Premier releases \$230 million plan for child protection reform

3 March 2009

Premier Nathan Rees and Community Services Minister Linda Burney today announced the Government's detailed package of reforms to the State's child protection system following Justice Wood's landmark 2008 inquiry.

The plan includes a Stage One investment of \$230 million with further funding to be considered as part of the 09/10 Budget.

Keep Them Safe: A Shared Approach To Child Wellbeing is a five year plan to improve support for children and families.

"The NSW Government is investing more to support families and protect children most at risk," Mr Rees said.

"We are investing in a better life for these children – investing in a better future."

Mr Rees said that child protection is a responsibility that we must all share.

"Most children in NSW have parents who are willing and able to care for and love them and that is no less than a child deserves," Mr Rees said.

"Yet it is a sad truth that not all parents can provide a safe and loving environment for their children."

The Government has responded comprehensively to Justice Wood's report supporting 106 of the 111 recommendations.

"Justice Wood found the overwhelming number of reports received by the DoCS Helpline meant families in less serious categories did not always receive the attention and support they needed," Mr Rees said.

"Serious cases will still be dealt with by the Department of Community Services, but we will ensure that less serious cases are assessed and referred to community-based services that provide support.

"We will strengthen the system's ability to help families before their problems reach crisis point with a bigger emphasis on prevention and early intervention."

In support of Justice Wood's recommendations the Government's package include:

- Increasing the reporting threshold for matters reported to the Department of Community Services to 'risk of significant harm', allowing DoCS to focus on serious cases and other agencies and NGOs to deliver local services;
- Establishment of a state-wide network of Child Wellbeing units in Health, Education, Housing, Police, Juvenile Justice and Disabilities, enabling a quicker response to children who are identified as being at risk by teachers, police, doctors and other mandatory reporters;

- Trialling new referral services to help Government agencies link families to community-based services;
- More than \$31 million for an expansion of an early intervention program which provides case management, parenting programs, child care and home visiting to families with children aged 0-8;
- \$27 million for services that work intensively with families that are facing the removal of their children;
- More than \$10 million for Home School Liaison Officers and Out Of Home Care Coordinators to be expanded so that more families are able to receive early support;
- More than \$7 million for Aboriginal caseworkers and involving the Aboriginal community in decision-making. There will be an Aboriginal Impact Statement attached to each of the actions in the plan;
- \$10 million for sustained home visiting: specialist child and family health nurses working intensively with high-need families during pregnancy and in the first two years of a child's life; and
- Extending background checks to new groups including volunteers in high risk roles with children and family day care providers.

Community Services Minister Linda Burney said that the Government values the contribution of community organisations in providing services for children and families.

“We are pleased to allocate over \$100 million to the non government sector in Stage One and in line with Justice Wood’s recommendation the Government commits to a gradual transfer of responsibility for most out-of-home care services to the NGO sector,” Ms Burney said.

“A five year program will be developed in partnership with peak bodies, unions and government agencies to develop strategies to recruit, train and retain front line workers.”

Mr Rees said that everyone who works with vulnerable children deserves the community’s support.

“Justice Wood highlighted the complex factors that can lead to child abuse including domestic violence, drug and alcohol abuse, mental health problems, and intergenerational disadvantage,” Mr Rees said.

“We received Justice Wood’s report on 24 November and I undertook to provide a Government response no later than the first week in March. This detailed plan delivers on that commitment.”