



## **MEDIA RELEASE**

**Monday, 10 February 2014**

# **BUDGET CUTS LEAVE DANGEROUS GAPS IN NSW CHILD PROTECTION SAFETY NET**

Community Services staff have been left struggling to deal with the impacts of the NSW Government's penny-pinching on child protection, according to the Public Service Association.

Media reports today show NSW is spending less on child protection per child than any other state in Australia.

The Department of Family and Community Services was forced into admitting it had not filled caseworker vacancies as a means of managing budgets, despite previous denials by Minister Pru Goward.

PSA Assistant Secretary Steve Turner said the NSW government's attempt to do child protection on the cheap was placing some of the state's most vulnerable children and their families at risk.

"Almost 45,000 children who were deemed at significant risk last year did not receive face-to-face safety checks with a caseworker, according to the State government's own figures," Mr Turner said.

"We now know the Coniston branch was understaffed when a sad and avoidable event occurred with a two-year-old child known to DOCs. A tragedy like this can never be allowed to happen again.

"Despite best efforts, staff are overwhelmed by inadequate resources and understaffing that stops them from essential face-to-face work with vulnerable children and their families.

"Caseworker and staff vacancy rates remain as high as 40% in some offices, including in areas with high rates of at-risk children and families.

"It's Minister Pru Goward's responsibility to immediately address these staff shortages and ensure community services staff have the resources to do their job well. Children will fall through the gaps if this doesn't occur," he said.

The NSW Government's second Community Services Caseworker Dashboard, including caseworker numbers and vacancies, is due for publication this month. It will be available at: <http://bit.ly/1eHjCSU>

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