

22 September 2017

## Community Services member update - State Government's Response to Upper House Inquiry into child protection demonstrates why child protection MUST be in the safe hands of the public sector

The NSW Government has given a predictably poor response to the Upper House Inquiry into Child Protection – [REFER TO REPORT HERE](http://psa.asn.au/wp-content/uploads/2017/09/Governments-Response-Child-Protection.pdf).

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Only 12 of the 28 recommendations were supported by the Government, one recommendation was supported in principle and the other 15 recommendations were merely noted. It is full steam ahead with the Berejiklian-Goward agenda.

Much of the Government's response relies on *Their Futures Matter*, which is the FACS response to the Tune Report. Despite repeated requests by the PSA, the Minister and Department have so far refused to release this report.

In the interests of transparency and openness, the PSA again calls on Minister Goward to release the Tune Report so the community is clear about what is in this document that has influenced so many recent decisions about Out of Home Care (OOHC).

The Government's response also places great emphasis on the \$190 million announced over four years in 2016/17 as part of *Their Futures Matter* and therefore the recommendation for additional one-off funding was noted and clearly will not be actioned.

### Longer contracts with NGOs are on the agenda

The PSA has repeatedly called for enhanced accountability and better monitoring of contracts. The Government only noted Recommendation 1 and provided an alarming response:

*That the NSW Government ensures that future funding contracts for evidence-based prevention and early intervention services are provided for a minimum of 5 years, provided that the contracts incorporate specific termination*

*clauses that may be activated if key performance indicators, incorporated into the contract, are not achieved.*

As part of the NSW Government's response to this recommendation, reference is made to the draft report of the Productivity Commission's Inquiry into Australia's human services "Introducing Competition and Informed User Choice into Human Services". This report apparently includes draft recommendations that governments increase default contract lengths for family and community services to seven years.

The NSW Government's response goes on to say that the final report will be delivered to the Australian Government in October 2017 and the NSW Government will take into account the final recommendations of the Productivity Commission when considering changes to contractual arrangements.

Members can be assured that any move to seven-year contracts will be strenuously opposed by the PSA, particularly in view of the response to Recommendation 12.

### Government refuses to increase powers of Auditor-General

To put it mildly, the PSA is disappointed the Government has ruled out implementation of Recommendation 12.

*That the NSW Government makes legislative amendments to extend the performance audit function of the Auditor-General to include audits of all non-government organisations who have been provided with state funding to deliver child protection related services.*



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The Government's response advises that "changes to the performance audit function of the Auditor-General are not being considered at this time. However, the NSW Government will undertake a regulatory impact analysis in relation to NGOs that deliver child protection-related services to provide informed options on whether strengthening or change of existing arrangements may be required".

This is a lost opportunity to ensure greater NGO accountability in their use of funds allocated by the Government as part of the privatisation agenda. The Government's response is completely inadequate given the enormous problems identified in OOHC with more than 20,000 children and young people in the system and up to 200 children housed in hotels and motels on any one night in NSW. We will continue to see countless millions of dollars meant for the care of children syphoned off by the big NGOs to further expand their operations. Children will continue to suffer as a result of privatisation and there will continue to be no accountability.

### Carer Program outsourced

Recommendation 13 is supported by the Government:

*That the NSW Government in consultation with stakeholders, develops additional resources, training and support for carers.*

However, the devil is the detail of the Government's response as "FACS will go to market to procure an agency or consortium to deliver an integrated approach specifically to recruit, develop and support restoration carers, respite carers and people who want to adopt under this new Carer Program. The successful agency will be required to collaborate with funded OOHC service providers, FACS and

peak organisations to ensure a coordinated and seamless approach for any person that embarks on the carer journey in NSW".

The PSA strongly argues that any new Carer Program should be run by the Department and should include the recruitment of carers. There is expertise in FACS to run such a program, yet funds are being wasted on going "to market". This is an ideologically blinkered approach to an essential component of out of home care services.

### Government ignores recommendation to set caseload targets

Recommendation 19 was noted by the Government:

*That the Department of Family and Community Services, in consultation with the PSA and staff, set caseload targets for caseworkers, taking into account the complex nature of child protection.*

However, the Government's response categorically states that caseload targets will not be set but notes that FACS has committed to updating the existing workload planner in consultation with the PSA following full implementation of the new ChildStory casework management system by early 2018.

The reality for most caseworkers is at odds with this statement, as the Department continues to unofficially set arbitrary and excessive caseloads for Caseworkers across the state.

### FACS to consult with the PSA about health, well-being and safety of staff

The State Government has indicated its support of Recommendation 20:



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*That the Department of Family and Community Services in consultation with the Public Service Association, change workplace systems to improve the health, well-being and safety of staff, given the challenging nature of child protection work.*

While it is welcome news that this recommendation is supported, FACS has done precious little to improve the health, well-being and safety of staff. There is a lot of spin in the Government's response but no substance. FACS has failed to introduce a framework to address the inherent risks associated with vicarious and secondary trauma for casework staff working in child protection. The PSA will continue to strenuously advocate that FACS establish an appropriately resourced framework.

### Government will be held to account

The final recommendation (28) is supported by the Government

*That the Minister for Family and Community Services provide a report to the NSW Parliament by the end of August 2018 on the NSW Government's progress in implementing the recommendations in this report*

Much of the Government's response has a flavour of continuing with business as usual and fails to support recommendations which would increase the accountability of NGOs. Vulnerable children and families and the hard-working, loyal and committed caseworkers employed by FACS deserve so much more.

However the Government will ultimately be held to account by the Parliament when it reports in August 2018 and when it next faces the people of NSW in March 2019. The PSA will work hard to raise

awareness with politicians and the community about the complex problems in child protection that have been exacerbated by the Government's ideological obsession with privatisation.

### Keep Child Protection in Safe Hands

There has never been a more important time for members to join the PSA's Safe Hands Campaign. We will work with our members to promote the great value and effectiveness of child protection services in the public sector over the coming months.

This campaign will run over the next 18 months in the lead up to the next State election to influence both sides of politics to appropriately resource FACS to **directly deliver** Child Protection and OOHC services. This resourcing should include caseworker, administrative, specialist and head office staff who are all crucial to achieving the best possible outcomes for children and young people who cannot live at home or need adequate casework and support services to remain safely living at home.

A copy of the Government's Response to the Upper House Inquiry into Child Protection can be obtained [HERE](#).

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Now is the time to encourage your colleagues to **JOIN** the PSA online, or see your delegates for membership forms.

*Stronger, Together – A unionised workplace is a fairer one!*

