

200 ANNUAL REPORTS ★ DISABLED CARE WOES ★ GRAND PRIX COST BLOWOUT ★ HOSPITALS IN THE RED ★ COURTS STRAINING

Bonuses paid while disabled suffer

By **FARRAH TOMAZIN**
VICTORIAN AFFAIRS EDITOR

DISABLED and mentally ill Victorians have received sub-standard care — and in some cases had their lives placed at risk — while executives from the departments overseeing them have been paid lucrative bonuses in the past 12 months.

In a damning report tabled in Parliament yesterday, the Office of the Public Advocate has warned that some of the most vulnerable Victorians are not getting the care or accommodation they require because of under-funding, under-qualified staff and a lack of long-term planning.

In one case, an elderly resident with dementia was restrained in a chair for 11 hours a day, but staff had

not been trained on how to use the restraint or aware that there could be adverse effects.

In another case, a gravely ill woman, who took more than five weeks and three trips to hospital before she was diagnosed, did not get 24-hour nursing care when she returned to her residential home.

And in one residential home, a disabled person who suffered epileptic seizures at night was found soaked in urine “most mornings” because there were no night staff to attend to his needs.

The cases were contained in the latest report for the Public Advocate’s “Community Visitors”, who act as public watchdogs for people who are disabled, mentally ill or live in supported residential homes.

According to the report, more than 5000 visits were made over the past financial year and there were several examples of good practice. But Public Advocate Colleen Pearce said she was “troubled” at the level of concerns about safety, security and the treatment of residents.

“These are not just theoretical, remote concerns. In virtual every area dealt with by Community Visitors, failure to take action can have life and death consequences,” her report warned.

The latest concerns came as the government released more than 200 annual reports in Parliament yesterday — described by the Opposition as a bid to avoid scrutiny.

Annual reports for the departments of health and human services

— which oversees disabled and mentally ill Victorians — show that in 2009 and 2010, 294 executives received salaries ranging from \$90,000 to \$540,000, with “a number” of them getting undisclosed bonus payments over that period.

In other developments yesterday:

■ The Melbourne Grand Prix posted its biggest loss, leaving a \$49 million bill for Victorian taxpayers.

■ A Labor-dominated parliamentary committee called on the Brumby government to overhaul state taxes and introduce a new levy on cars.

■ A report into Victoria’s busiest health service, Melbourne Health, found it has fallen more than \$3 million into the red and its financial position is unlikely to improve this year.

■ The County Court has warned it

may be at capacity in hearing the increasing number of sex-offence cases with court resources being “severely tested”.

Community Services Minister Lisa Neville said the government expected people with mental illnesses and disabilities to be treated with respect and dignity, and recently provided the Community Visitors program with an additional \$200,000. Asked if she agreed the system was in crisis, she replied: “They do say that in the report, but the report is until June 30. . . . and we . . . have recently resolved the increase in funding.”

Opposition community services spokeswoman Mary Wooldridge said the report was yet another example of government failure to provide appropriate services for the vulnerable.