



## Media Release

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### Incidents reports lost, locked up and incomplete – Community Visitors

Reports detailing serious incidents in accommodation for Victorians with a disability or a mental illness are being mislaid, are incomplete or not available for scrutiny by Community visitors.

This was a key finding by all Community Visitor areas ('streams') as outlined in this year's Community Visitors Annual Report tabled in State Parliament today.

Public Advocate, Colleen Pearce, who chairs the combined Community Visitor stream Boards, said that the boards want mandatory incident report registers introduced in residences for those with a disability, Supported Residential Services (SRS) and mental health units in Victoria. [p.6] The registers should then be regularly and independently audited.

The lack of availability, and quality, of incident reports was a significant factor last year in the referral by the Public Advocate to Ombudsman Victoria of a suspected matter of abuse of a man with a disability in a DHS-run Community Residential Unit.

"Incident reporting is a key tool for monitoring whether abuse or neglect is occurring and, therefore, is fundamental to the quality of care being provided to citizens with a disability or a mental illness", Ms Pearce said.

Under the law Community Visitors are empowered to carry out visits and to inspect all documentation. It is reported often by Community Visitors that, on arrival for regular but unannounced visits, incident reports are unable to be located, are inaccessible, incomplete or unavailable for inspection.

Community Visitors found issues related to incident reports in all types of accommodation.

- in mental health units, they are created and filed electronically and so it is difficult for staff to have a complete understanding of incidents
- in SRS, they are not required to be centralised
- in Community residential units for those with a disability, sometimes they can't be found, or are incomplete.

"Incident reporting is an extremely important duty for staff because it can relate to serious abuse, neglect and injury. It can be instrumental in reporting these and then ensuring that there are transparent processes which support the victim in getting the help they require and the justice to which they are entitled."

Community Visitors are empowered by law to visit people with a disability and, or a mental illness in accommodation providing 24-hour support throughout the state. During 2010-2011, a total of 323 Community Visitors across all areas or 'streams' of the program made 5069 visits across Victoria. The value of their volunteer effort has been estimated at \$3.6 m annually.

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