

CHILD ABUSE - SUBSTANTIATION RATE IN WESTERN AUSTRALIA

1747. Mr P.D. Omodei to the Minister for Community Development

According to National Research Centre for Prevention of Child Abuse, WA has the lowest substantiation rate for child abuse allegations in Australia, with only two cases per 1,000 allegations of abuse being substantiated. This compared to Queensland's rate of 14.1 per 1,000. Will the Minister please advise -

- (1) Why are substantiation rates for child abuse allegations so low in Western Australia?
- (2) Is it true that the appallingly low number of abuse allegations able to be confirmed by the DCD is a result of the poor resourcing and operation of the child protection system under your watch, and if not, why not?

Mr D.A. TEMPLEMAN replied:

- (1) The "Child Protection Australia" reports (the source for the National Research Centre for Prevention of Child Abuse) show that the average rate of 2.2 children per 1000 children in the WA community aged 0-16 years who were the subjects of substantiated investigations of child maltreatment has not changed since 1996-97. The authors of the "Child Protection Australia" report note that data from States and Territories should not be compared because of different:

- definitions of "child abuse", "substantiation" and "notification"
- policies and procedures for the recording of data
- policy based and legislated approaches to notification of suspicion of child abuse
- legislation guiding statutory intervention.

WA undertakes a further screening process than other States, designed to differentiate between reports about harm and/or maltreatment of children and child and family concerns. This reduces the number of notifications reported for national data purposes in that only reports about child harm and/or maltreatment are provided.

- (2) No. Ensuring that the child protection system is properly equipped to keep our children safe has been and remains of the highest priority for the Carpenter Government, and our record stands for itself. This Government has built on the achievements of the Gallop Government in this area, which included the most significant overhaul of child protection laws in over half a century.

For example, in the 2006-07 state budget the Carpenter Government allocated an extra \$140 million to the Department for Community Development, the single biggest increase in its history; and in September 2006 a further \$50 million was provided to employ 133 extra workers, including 87 caseworkers in this financial year. Prior to September the Government, since 2001, had already provided the funding needed to employ an additional 216 workers in the area of caring and protecting children. Total funding for the Department for Community Development had also increased by more than 40 percent in the same period. However, as a result of public debate following the 2006-07 budget the Government recognised that these further additional resources were needed to meet the rapidly increasing needs of vulnerable children and families at risk and moved quickly to provide the additional funding.

The Carpenter Government's major reform of the child protection system in WA has also led to two vital reviews, most recently a major structural review of the Department for Community Development. The review will ensure the department's primary focus is on the protection of children. The review is examining cultural and structural issues within the department and ways of ensuring that money is being spent in the key area of child protection. This structural review followed a review which commenced in August 2006 into cases in which serious concerns about children's safety had been raised by family members and their advocates.

The creation of the first Child Protection portfolio in the history of the Western Australian Government in December 2006 will ensure that the clear focus on this area continues. As the first Minister with responsibility for this portfolio I am committed to redressing the effects of years of neglect by the Coalition Government in this area and ensuring that workers in my department are equipped for the important role of keeping our children safe.