

## Media Release

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For immediate release

# Staff speaking up more about abuse in disability services

**A report tabled in Parliament today highlights the important role played by disability support staff in reporting abuse of Victorians with a disability.**

The number of complaints made to the Victorian Disability Services Commissioner (DSC) relating to allegations of assault, abuse or neglect has grown from an average of 6 per cent of all complaints two years ago to 21 per cent in the past year.

Laurie Harkin AM, Disability Services Commissioner said, “Contributing to this growth is greater public awareness of these issues after the recent inquiries into abuse of people with a disability. Disability support staff are making more complaints now about allegations of assault, abuse or neglect when they see a co-worker behaving inappropriately.”

In the past year, only one of these complaints was made by a person with a disability whereas 33 per cent were from disability support staff.

The Commissioner said “This highlights the need for a strong safeguarding framework for the rights of people with a disability and reinforces the importance of mandatory reporting of abuse by disability staff.”

To better respond to this growth of complaints requiring investigation, DSC has strengthened its investigative capacity. In the past year, 9 investigations were finalised and thirteen investigations were underway at 30 June 2016.

The Minister for Housing, Disability and Ageing has also recently expanded the scope of DSC independent oversight of critical incident reports from the Department of Health and Human Services and disability service providers.

The Commissioner said “Starting 1 July 2016, my office will be providing oversight of Category One incident reports of injury, assault and poor quality of care for people receiving disability services. This expanded oversight further strengthens our ability to influence policy and practice within the disability sector to improve prevention and responses to the abuse of people with a disability.

The Commissioner concludes, “The combination of increased investigative capacity and increased oversight of Category One incident reports means that DSC is better placed to uphold and promote the rights of people with a disability.”

To access the 2016 Disability Services Commissioner Annual Report, please visit [www.odsc.vic.gov.au](http://www.odsc.vic.gov.au).

**Key Highlights:**

- Complaints of allegations of assault, abuse or neglect to DSC have grown from an average of 6 per cent of all complaints two years ago to 21 per cent in the past year.
- Only one person with a disability made a complaint about allegations of assault, abuse or neglect. Disability support workers made 33 per cent of these complaints.
- In 2015–16, DSC finalised 9 investigations into complaints of allegations of assault, abuse or neglect with 13 investigations underway at 30 June 2016.
- In 2015–16, DSC reviewed 348 incident reports about allegations of assault and injury from the Department of Health and Human Services and disability services providers.
- 87 per cent of incident reports reviewed by DSC related to allegations of physical or sexual assault by a staff member. 13 per cent related to incidents of unexplained injury.

-ENDS-

**Media Enquiries**

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