



Response to the Wood Inquiry

A report launched today calls for a fundamental review on how child and family services in NSW are funded. With the NSW Cabinet to consider its response to the Wood Inquiry in the coming days, the AASW report calls for a clear commitment from the Government to enable community sector staff and agencies to support vulnerable children and their families.

In responding to the recommendations of the Wood Inquiry into Child Protection services in NSW, the AASW knows that it will be critical for the NSW Government to enhance the capacity of the community sector to protect some of the State's most vulnerable children.

"Without the human and financial resources to do the job, the community sector will struggle to provide high quality services to vulnerable children and their families," said **AASW National President Professor Bob Lonne**.

The community sector attracts dedicated and skilled professionals, including social workers, who are committed to working with families under stress to resolve their issues and prevent them entering the mandated child protection system where possible. Nonetheless, across the country, the sector is characterised by relatively low wages and poor conditions, compared to the public and private sectors, short term funding and a lack of professional development opportunities.

The AASW paper comes in the lead up to the NSW Government announcements of its response to the Wood Inquiry. Specifically, the AASW report calls for:

- Accreditation of all staff working in the child protection system to ensure high quality skills and values;
- A clear indication from the NSW Government on who will carry the "risk", or duty of care, towards vulnerable children and their families outside of the mandated child protection system;
- Reform of the funding of the community sector, to enable long term planning, staff development and parity of wages and conditions with equivalent positions in the public sector; and
- A comprehensive workforce strategy for the public and not-for-profit child protection systems, which will attract, retain and develop high quality staff to work with vulnerable children and their families in NSW.

There have been too many tragic child deaths in NSW to allow the recommendations of the Wood Inquiry to go unaddressed, or cherry-picked. This is an opportunity to take every possible step to prevent more children entering the child protection system, and to avoid future tragedies.

"We're pleased by the attitude taken by the NSW Government, and the Minister for Community Services in particular. We trust they will do whatever is necessary to support vulnerable children and their families in NSW," said **AASW National President Professor Bob Lonne**.