

MEDIA RELEASE – 23.07.2014

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

National approach to protecting our children needed

The Australian Association of Social Workers (AASW) believes Working with Children Checks alone do not guarantee the safety of children in our institutions, as shown in recent allegations of child abuse against a South Australian man.

Yesterday a report on ABC revealed a man employed to provide care to vulnerable pre-school children had allegedly been sexually abusing them and using the children to produce child pornography.

President of the AASW Professor Karen Healy has called for national leadership, community education and support for institutions in establishing and maintaining child safe environments.

“We need to move the focus to ensuring we have safe institutions rather than just trying to identify high risk individuals. A national approach to child safety, reflected in universal minimum standards and processes that supplemented Working with Children Checks is needed.

“Further investment is also required in independent bodies, such as Children’s Commissioners, to educate, monitor and support the community and institutions on child safety matters.”

In 2013, the AASW prepared submissions tackling the issue of child safety in institutions, where the significant shortcomings of the Working with Children Check system were highlighted.

We believe the community should be educated on child grooming behaviours (what a child abuser does to gain the trust of communities, organisations, parents, co-workers and children); how to raise concerns; and needs to trust that these will be taken seriously and acted upon. Critical is the need for environments to be monitored for situational risk. In this instance, a situational risk was clearly that this man was apparently left alone with these children long enough to groom, sexually abuse and film or photograph them.

For copies of the AASW submissions on child safety and our recommendations on how to prevent sexual abuse in institutions, click here: <http://www.aasw.asn.au/social-policy-advocacy/issue/children-families-and-young-people>

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