

## *MEDIA RELEASE – 24.11.14*

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### **Abandoned baby sparks call for more support**

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The Australian Association of Social Workers (AASW) is calling for vulnerable parents to receive more support to avoid further cases such as the abandoned baby boy found in Sydney yesterday morning.

National President of the AASW Professor Karen Healy says baby abandonment is usually an “extremely rare” situation, with roughly less than ten cases of outright abandonment across Australia each year.

“Typically, parents will abandon their baby because of a complete inability to take care of their child, and very often they are looking for someone else to care for child but don't want to be investigated,” says Professor Healy.

“This case is quite a different scenario, and it's clear the parents wanted the baby hidden. Babies are generally left on church doorsteps or at hospitals, in high-traffic areas where the parents know someone will find them and take care of them. There could be some element of shame, where their families perhaps weren't aware they were pregnant.”

Professor Healy believes there is a need for a comprehensive and supportive response that enables parents to address the reasons behind the 'need' to abandon. This should include outreach to vulnerable parents during the antenatal period.

“There are three points at which our support needs to be better: antenatal care that outreaches to vulnerable people; good identification and support of vulnerable individuals in the hospital at the time of the birth as well as the development of a sufficiently trusting relationship to ensure that families get the support they need; and after hospital release support,” Professor Healy says.

“Attaching midwifery and other antenatal care services to homelessness centres and locations where people are receiving treatment for mental health and drug issues is also a good idea.

“It is in the interests of both the child and the mother that we seek to understand and support parents before condemning them.”

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