

MEDIA RELEASE

Wednesday 18th January 2006

Embargoed until 1am Wednesday 18th January 2006



Australia's National Shame Child Abuse Dramatically Worsens Again

According to the *Child Protection Australia 2004-05* Report, released today by the Australian Institute of Health and Welfare (AIHW), the number of Australian children suffering abuse continues to dramatically worsen.

Every indicator of abuse has increased every year for six years – child abuse notifications; substantiated abuse cases; children on care and protection orders; and the number of children in out-of-home care. Indigenous children continue to be significantly over represented in every one of these areas.

Adam Blakester, Executive Officer of Australia's lead national child abuse prevention agency, NAPCAN Foundation, says "These findings confirm that child abuse and neglect continues to be Australia's most serious social problem bar none – and it's getting worse."

"Not only are the numbers of children harmed increasing, the complexity and seriousness of the causes and circumstances associated with child abuse continue to worsen – particularly substance abuse, mental health and family violence. Then there is the long term and inter-generational nature of the consequences and costs of child abuse and neglect."

"These figures are the tip of the iceberg," warns Blakester. "For every child reported abused countless others are unknown and remain vulnerable."

The NAPCAN Foundation believes solving this complex and massive problem requires every Australian to get involved:

- At a national level we need research to identify the full scale of the problem of child abuse;
- On a personal level every one of us can and must play a part in preventing child abuse – before it starts.

For example, the AIHW Report revealed an over-representation of sole-parent families in substantiated abuse cases. Sole parents are more likely to have low incomes or be financially stressed; be socially isolated; or have less support from their immediate family. These are all factors that have been associated with child abuse and neglect.

"Even simple things that we all can do make a difference," explains Blakester. "Cooking and sharing a meal with a sole parent family can help reduce stress and isolation, while creating a friendlier community too."

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