

**MEDIA RELEASE**

**18 September 2012**

**Yes Minister - Once is one time too many!**

People with Disability Australia (PWDA) welcomes the NSW Minister for Disability Services’ announcement of a review of background checks and the procedures to investigate allegations of sexual and physical abuse of people with disability by disability service staff. However, these measures alone will not address the breadth of issues affecting people with disability experiencing violence and abuse**.**

Ms Jan Daisley, President of PWDA says ‘We must act urgently to put in place preventative measures to stop abuse in addition to ensuring adequate systems are in place once it has occurred. The ABC’s Lateline story ‘Carers abuse their charges’ aired on 12th of September outlined shocking cases of abuse, cover-ups, silencing of victims and failure to investigate allegations occurring in Victoria and we are aware of such cases happening across Australia.

PWDA is a long time campaigner for system improvements to prevent violence, remove service access barriers and increase responses for people with disability experiencing, or at risk of violence. ‘PWDA has raised this issue with Governments many times, using real cases of abuse and highlighting measures necessary to prevent and address these situations’, says Ms Daisley, ‘these issues are not new and enough is enough’.

‘Research and experience tells us that most people with disability will experience violence, abuse, neglect and exploitation at some point in their lives. Too many will experience it every day of their lives. We also know that high levels of violence are commonly experienced by people with disability living in institutions or supported accommodation settings. Observations by the United Nations identified the abuse and violence experienced by women with disabilities living in institutions or supported accommodation as a matter of priority for Australia back in 2010’ say Ms Daisley. ‘We again call for the all Governments across the country to step up Australia’s obligation to recognise, protect and fulfil the human rights of people with disability’.

Several comprehensive reports released by PWDA over recent years have detailed these realities as well as providing detailed recommendations to Government to increase safeguards, remove barriers and improve prevention mechanisms. Whilst some recommendations have been adopted, most remain unaddressed.

PWDA supports calls for a national approach to reduce and eliminate violence and risk of abuse experienced by people with disability including:

* a national ‘vulnerable adults’ protection system that outlines action for administrative and legislative reform to increase the protection of people with disability from violence, abuse and neglect;
* abolishing the congregation of people with disability in institutions and congregate accommodation settings which are settings known to increase opportunity for violence and abuse and immediate relocation of residents in these facilities to safe housing in the community with individualised support;
* public release of all investigative reports relating to issues of violence, abuse and neglect of people with disability in all Government, non-government and licensed disability services;
* increased training and support of disability service staff;
* all States and Territory domestic violence legislation to recognise the unique domestic relationships and forms of violence experienced by people with disability; and
* improved responses by domestic and family violence services to people with disability.

I agree with the NSW Minister for Disability Services that ‘one case is one case too many’ says Ms Daisley, ‘it is now time to act’.

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*People with Disability Australia Incorporated (PWD) is a national disability rights and advocacy organisation. Our primary membership is made up of people with disability and organisations mainly constituted by people with disability.  We have a cross-disability focus - we represent the interests of people with all kinds of disability.  PWD is a non-profit, non-government organisation.*

*Our vision is of a socially just, accessible and inclusive community, in which the human rights, citizenship, contribution, potential and diversity of all people with disability are respected and celebrated.  This vision underpins everything that we do.*