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Shining a light on the abuse and neglect of people with disability

Against the background of recent media on the abuse and neglect of people with disability in Victoria, the NSW Ombudsman today highlighted the importance of new legislation about to be introduced in NSW that represents an Australian first in protections for people with disability in supported accommodation.

From Wednesday 3 December, disability services will be required to report allegations of abuse, neglect and exploitation of people with disability living in supported group accommodation to the Ombudsman's office, as part of critical reforms under the *Disability Inclusion Act 2014*.

“The introduction of the disability reportable incidents scheme is a vital move towards shining a light on the abuse, neglect and exploitation of vulnerable people with disability,” said the Ombudsman, Bruce Barbour.

“The NSW Government’s proactive step in legislating mandatory reporting and independent oversight of the handling of serious incidents provides an important opportunity to deliver significant improvements in the lives of people with disability.”

Under the scheme, the Department of Family and Community Services and funded providers of disability supported group accommodation will be required to notify the Ombudsman of the following types of allegations:

- any sexual offence, sexual misconduct, assault, fraud, ill-treatment or neglect of a person with disability living in the accommodation by an employee
- an assault of a person with disability living in the accommodation by another person with disability living in the same place that is a sexual offence, causes serious injury, involves the use of a weapon, or is part of a pattern of abuse
- an incident involving the contravention of an apprehended violence order made for the protection of a person with disability, and
- an incident involving an unexplained serious injury to a person with disability living in supported group accommodation.

The Ombudsman's role includes overseeing the actions of agencies to investigate and appropriately respond to these allegations.

“Through our discussions with the disability sector and the broader community, we are aware of genuine enthusiasm and strong support for the introduction of the scheme,” said Mr Barbour.

“For the first time, we will be able to get a true understanding of the extent of serious abuse in disability accommodation services, and to take critical action, in partnership with people with disability, services and families, to address it.”