

Media Release,

March 1, 2012



The Vulnerable Children Inquiry - a welcomed report for Victoria's children and young people

The release this week of the independent report into Victoria's system for protecting vulnerable children and young people is a welcomed contribution to the improvement of the child protection system. The Youth Affairs Council of Victoria (YACVic) notes that the needs, experiences, rights and voices of vulnerable children and young people are at the heart of this inquiry.

"The report is a substantial document that will require careful consideration" YACVic CEO, Georgie Ferrari said today. YACVic has identified some key recommendations that have particular significance to young people and the sector that supports them.

YACVic is highly supportive of the recommendation that home-based care and residential care out-of-home placement and support arrangements be extended on a voluntary and needs basis for young people over 18 years and that assistance following care be provided on a needs basis for young people up to 25 years.

Another recommendation is that a whole of government Vulnerable Children and Families Strategy be developed. This strategy will include a definition of vulnerable children and young people, whole-of-government objectives and responsibilities for departments, as well as accountability structures. Importantly, information regarding performance will be published in the State of Victoria's Children Report.

In addition, the Inquiry advised that a new Children's Service Committee of Cabinet be established. "We are highly supportive of this recommendation, however we note that the Inquiry Panel did not recommend that the Minister for Youth be included on this committee", Ms Ferrari said. "YACVic would strongly urge that both the Minister for Children and the Minister for Youth have representation on this committee, should the Baillieu Government decide to implement this recommendation".

YACVic is particularly pleased with the Report's recommendations regarding the establishment of an independent Commission for Children and Young People and a specific Aboriginal Children's Commissioner. The report advises that the Commission should have responsibility for overseeing and reporting to Ministers and Parliament on all laws, policies, programs and services that affect the wellbeing of vulnerable children and young people. "We are very pleased that the Panel has recommended that the Commissioner should be given own-motion powers to investigate matters that they see of importance. This is something YACVic has long advocated for" Ms Ferrari said.

In terms of the appointment of an Aboriginal Children's Commissioner both YACVic and the Victorian Indigenous Youth Advisory Council (VIYAC) welcome the recommendation. "It would be our hope that the person appointed as Commissioner, should that role be established, be of Aboriginal descent" said VIYAC State Coordinator, Tim Kanoa.

YACVic also notes that the report recommends extending mandatory reporting obligations to other professions listed in the *Children, Youth and Families Act 2005* (Vic). This might include youth workers. "We would hope that this would be fully explored and consulted on before being implemented as it could potentially have

significant impacts for both the profession of youth work and the Department of Human Services" Ms Ferrari said.

For further comment please contact

Georgie Ferrari

CEO

0411 484 42