**Media Release**

**Commission annual report details another year in the  
vital oversight of care and protection of Victoria’s children**

*Tuesday 20 December 2022 – for immediate release*

The 2021–22 annual report of the Commission for Children and Young People was tabled in the Parliament of Victoria today.

‘Our latest report details another year of vital oversight of the care and protection of children and young people in Victoria, and shows once again that action is desperately needed to ensure the child protection, out-of-home care and youth justice systems meet children’s needs. The report also shares new data showing that the Reportable Conduct Scheme and Child Safe Standards continue to uncover abuse of children in organisations at unprecedented levels,’ said Liana Buchanan, Victoria’s Principal Commissioner for Children and Young People, today.

Inquiries completed this year again highlighted the devastating implications for children of a pressured child protection system and support services underfunded to meet the needs of vulnerable children and their families.

This included an inquiry into child protection’s responses to two children with disability, each of whom were the subject of multiple reports over 10 and 15 years respectively. Reports detailed chemical and physical restraint of the children and concerns they were kept isolated from services and the wider community, together with other forms of maltreatment. The inquiry found inadequate risk assessment and investigations, as well as premature case closures by child protection. It also found poor collaboration with the NDIS, highlighting heightened risk through the lack of clear NDIS requirements for children to be directly engaged or for NDIS-funded service providers to raise reports of parental abuse (see pp 23–24 of the report).

‘This inquiry echoed themes we have seen repeated over time in our child death inquiries, particularly the need for better assessment of risks to children with disability and stronger measures to ensure vulnerable children remain visible,’ Commissioner Buchanan said.

A second inquiry detailed in the annual report examined a child protection demand management strategy implemented in 2021 and reported anonymously to the Commission. The inquiry found there were insufficient safeguards in the strategy to protect children’s right to safety and, further, that there had been little or no communication between child protection and other child and family services before the strategy was implemented.

‘With premature case closures a recurrent theme of the Commission’s inquiries into the deaths of children known to child protection, any strategy to manage demand must place children’s best interests at its heart and measure any impact on their safety,’ Commissioner Buchanan said (see pp 22–23 of the report).

Incident report data published in the annual report show that residential care continues to be unsafe for many children, with limited action taken to address the recommendations of the June 2021 *Out of sight* report regarding children who go absent or missing from residential care, and further work needed on the recommendations of *In our own words*, the Commission’s 2019 inquiry into out-of-home care.

‘Concerningly, 2021–22 saw a 65 per cent increase from 2019–20 in incidents of children and young people going absent or missing from care (3,558 incidents) and a 28 per cent increase in sexual exploitation incidents (303 incidents). Until we see major reform of the model of residential care and real action to tackle sexual exploitation of children, we will continue to see children suffer serious sexual abuse and other harms when they leave placement,’ Commissioner Buchanan said.

As the Yoorrook Justice Commission continues its focus on the impact of the child protection and youth justice systems on Aboriginal children and young people, the annual report also revealed further concerning data beyond their persistent and significant over-representation in both systems.

In 2021–22, Aboriginal children and young people comprised 12 per cent of unique alleged victims of reportable conduct in Victoria, despite comprising just two per cent of the population (see p 80 of the report).

Aboriginal children and young people were also again over-represented in the Commission’s inquiries into children who die within 12 months of their last involvement with child protection – there were two Aboriginal children and young people among the 37 notifications of child deaths this year, and seven among 41 completed child death inquiries (see pp 31–34 of the report).

‘All the data show that Aboriginal children and young people are disproportionately drawn into the child protection and youth justice systems. A system that should protect children and young people too often brings further trauma into their lives, especially if they are Aboriginal,’ said Meena Singh, Victoria’s Commissioner for Aboriginal Children and Young People, today.

Further data on youth justice oversight were also published in the annual report. Of concern, the rate of lockdowns in youth justice per child or young person increased to 70 from 58 in 2020–21 (p 55). Assaults alone increased by 38 per cent from 2020–21 (see pp 48–49 of the report).

‘We continue to see children and young people impacted by frequent lockdowns resulting from staff shortages and absence. Isolating children and young people is harmful to their mental health and is likely to escalate rather than defuse tensions. This problem has persisted since we first raised it in 2017. Urgent action to bolster the youth justice workforce is overdue,’ Commissioner Buchanan said.

In 2021–22, a record number of notifications of allegations (1,238) were made to the Commission under the Reportable Conduct Scheme, with an increase of 23 per cent on the previous year and 54 per cent over the five years of the Scheme.

The annual report details that in the first five years, 2,346 allegations of child abuse and child-related misconduct have been substantiated, involving 1,360 victim survivors.

The substantiation rate for alleged sexual offences has been steadily increasing over the life of the Scheme, rising from 15 per cent in 2018–19 to 38 per cent in 2021–22. The substantiation rate for sexual misconduct allegations has increased in each of the last four years rising from 21 per cent in 2018–19 to 31 per cent in 2021–22.

‘The increase in notifications as well as substantiation rates for sexual offences and sexual misconduct confirms that abuse and harm to children in organisations is a problem we are still uncovering. Each year, we gain a clearer understanding of the scope of the challenge, and the scale of investment necessary to address it,’ Commissioner Buchanan concluded.

[Download the Commission’s annual report.](https://ccyp.vic.gov.au/assets/corporate-documents/CCYP-AR-21-22-Final-Web.pdf)

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