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FROM THE MINISTER FOR COMMUNITY SERVICES

Tuesday, 5 May 2009

VICTORIA'S RECORD INVESTMENT IN OUT OF HOME CARE

Protecting Victoria's most vulnerable children is the focus of a record **\$160.8 million** Brumby Labor Government investment and sweeping reforms in the Out of Home Care sector.

The Minister for Community Services, Lisa Neville, said Victoria's most vulnerable children and their families and carers, would benefit from the single biggest investment in Victorian history for Out of Home Care, announced today in the Brumby Labor Government's 2009 State Budget.

Ms Neville said the record \$160.8 million boost would significantly increase support services for children unable to live with their parents.

"The Brumby Labor Government's 2009 State Budget builds on our proud record of investment in social services to provide a social safety net for all Victorians," Ms Neville said.

"The Out of Home Care sector deals with many distressing and complex circumstances and they do it well. This record funding from the Brumby Labor Government will assist the sector, but it is only part of the answer.

"Just as important are the reforms we will undertake to ensure complex family circumstances receive the most sensitive and expert assistance possible.

"While the Brumby Labor Government's reforms focus on reunifying children with their families, we know that sometimes reunification is not the answer. Our funding and reforms aim to ensure the safety of children first.

"Since 1999 our Government has increased the budgets for family and community services, statutory child protection services and specialist and placement support services from \$215.8 million a year to \$509.4 million a year. We have completed the first overhaul of child protection in a century and are committed to continuing to modernise the system."

Key initiatives announced as part of record four-year funding package include:

- **\$134.7 million** to reform Out of Home Care, securing more home based care placements for children removed from their families, building capacity in residential care, recruiting 100 new live-in carers for children with challenging behaviours, recruiting new family mentors to provide intensive in-home support and better supporting community service organisations providing residential care. The quality of Out of Home Care will be enhanced by expanding therapeutic treatment services to help children recover from trauma and past experiences, by organising better access to positive activities and community support for children in residential care and by providing cultural competence training for placement services to better meet the needs of Aboriginal children. As part of this funding, \$10 million will be invested to upgrade existing residential care facilities to create welcoming and homely environments to aid in the transition to and from Out of Home Care;
- **\$14.6 million** to boost the capacity of the after hours child protection emergency and crisis response telephone service. This will expand the after hours child protection service to better respond to serious child protection concerns raised in the evening, on weekends and public holidays. It will also expand the operation of Streetworks Outreach Service, an after hours

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service staffed by child protection practitioners that seeks out, intervenes and protects child protection clients and other vulnerable children in the Melbourne Central Business District and St Kilda;

- **\$10.5 million** over four years to boost sexual assault counselling services for children. This funding secures nine jobs to continue to deliver sexual assault counselling services. The additional \$1.35 million allocated each year will enable an extra 770 children to receive specialised sexual assault counselling services and will continue the improvement in overall waiting times for this service throughout Victoria; and
- **\$1 million** to improve Victoria's response to vulnerable Aboriginal children and families through improved Koori Maternity Services.

"Our investments in sexual assault counselling services and to boost the capacity of the after hours child protection emergency and crisis response telephone service will help to address the needs of very vulnerable children," Ms Neville said.

"The Brumby Labor Government is leading the way in reforming the child protection and family services system. Our integrated system is considered the best in Australia and we are continuing work with the sector to reform the system.

"This will go a long way towards providing safe and caring environment for thousands of Victoria's most vulnerable children."