

INQUIRY INTO THE CHILD PROTECTION SYSTEM IN THE NORTHERN TERRITORY 2010

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www.childprotectioninquiry.nt.gov.au

Alice Springs child protection forum

The Inquiry into the Child Protection System in the Northern Territory will hold a community forum in Alice Springs on Tuesday night (16 February) at the Andy McNeill Room, Alice Springs Council.

The Inquiry's three Co-Chairs will explain how the Inquiry will operate and how to make submissions and ask for feedback on any issues community and professional groups want to see covered by the Inquiry.

"This could include any members of the public, foster carers, child protection workers, doctors, nurses, teachers – anyone with an interest in the protection and wellbeing of children," says Dr Rob Roseby, who worked as a paediatrician in Alice Springs from 2003 to mid-2009.

"We are holding some forums specifically for some professional groups as well."

"My experience in Alice Springs and remote communities has made me acutely aware of the specific issues relating to the health and wellbeing of Aboriginal children in Central Australia," Dr Roseby said.

"During my six years here, I had contact with many vulnerable children and vulnerable families. I also met many fantastic foster carers," he said.

"The inquiry is keen to ensure the Central Australian perspective is given strong weight in our findings so we encourage anyone with an interest in child protection to come along on Tuesday night or visit our website to find out more about how to make a submission," he said.

Formal public hearings will be held by the Co-Chairs in Darwin and regional centres in March.

The Inquiry into the Child Protection System was established by the Northern Territory Government to conduct a broad-ranging public Inquiry under the *Inquiries Act*.

Dr Howard Bath, who has taken leave from his role as Children's Commissioner to become one of the three Co-Chairs, said the Inquiry had assembled a strong team that included a Secretariat and researchers.

The Inquiry had wide-ranging powers to summons witnesses and documents but hoped for a cooperative approach, he said.

"This is a broad-ranging Inquiry that will look at systems, roles, structures, support services, responses and preventative measures to ensure vulnerable children and families receive the best possible support from both government and non-government agencies," Dr Bath said.

The third Co-Chair, Professor Muriel Bamblett, a Yorta Yorta woman from Victoria with a distinguished career in child welfare services, said agencies like hers were trying to “stem the flow of children from Aboriginal communities to child protection services through the provision of targeted interventions and support”.

“Across Australia Aboriginal children are over-represented in the child protection system,” she said. “We need to help vulnerable and at risk families become the circles of nurture, protection and care they are intended to be. But we must never sacrifice a child’s need to be safe.”

“All children deserve to be culturally, physically and emotionally safe. We need a child protection system that nurtures our children and strengthens our families,” she said.

Professor Bamblett said the Inquiry’s role included drawing together previous work and recommendations to “focus on a roadmap towards action”.

Dr Roseby, who was Head of Paediatrics at Alice Springs Hospital and a lecturer at Flinders University for six years until 2009, said the goal of a child protection system should be the wellbeing of children and families.

“Wellbeing means having a child who is happy, healthy, growing, developing appropriately physically, psychologically and culturally and who is able, at the right time, to attend school and get an education,” he said.

Dr Roseby said there appear to be problems inherent in child protection services across different jurisdictions and over decades.

“Recent inquiries have put the spotlight on problems that health professionals and child protection workers have been struggling with,” Dr Roseby said. “The time is right to re-examine the focus of the system.”

“This Inquiry brings together three independent Co-Chairs with vast experience, complementary backgrounds and the resources to look at the system as a whole. It is an opportunity to do something important for the Northern Territory’s current and future children.” he said.

The Inquiry encourages written and oral submissions from academics, practitioners, professional organisations and individuals with experience of and an interest in the child protection system.

As well as community forums in February and public hearings in March, the three Co-Chairs will visit Aboriginal communities, draw on the recommendations of other recent Inquiries and Coronial findings, look at interstate and overseas child protection models, take advice from its expert reference group and use invitations to acquire specific information.

More details of the inquiry and how to make submissions are available on the Inquiry’s website at www.childprotectioninquiry.nt.gov.au.

A range of protections are available to witnesses to the Inquiry and submissions can be made confidentially (see the website for more detail).

People can also contact the Secretariat of the Inquiry on freecall 1800 1800 770 543 or via email at reception.childprotectioninquiry@nt.gov.au.

Media contacts

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Professor Muriel Bamblett AM

Professor Muriel Bamblett is a Yorta Yorta woman who has been the Chief Executive Officer of the Victorian Aboriginal Child Care Agency (VACCA) since 1999. Professor Bamblett was Chairperson of VACCA from 1997 to 1999. From 1998-2008 she was the Chairperson of the Secretariat of National Aboriginal and Islander Child Care (SNAICC), the peak national agency representing Indigenous Child and Family Services.

Professor Bamblett is active on many boards concerning children, families and the Indigenous community, including being a Member of the Victorian Children's Council; a Ministerial appointed representative on the Australian Families and Children Council; a Community Member on the Victorian Youth Parole Board; and a Board Member of the Aboriginal Community Elders Service.

She has received a number of awards, including the 2003 Robin Clark Memorial Award for Inspirational Leadership in the Field of Child and Family Welfare. She was awarded an AM (Membership in the General Division) in the 2004 Australia Day Honours for services to the community. In 2008 Professor Bamblett took part in the Prime Minister's 2020 Summit and in 2009 LaTrobe University appointed her as an Adjunct Professor in the School of Social Work and Social Policy in the Faculty of Health Sciences.

Dr Rob Roseby

Dr Rob Roseby is a respiratory and general paediatrician who trained in Melbourne. He spent six years to mid-2009 at Alice Springs Hospital where he was senior lecturer for Flinders University NT Clinical School. He was head of paediatrics for most of that time and a member of the NT Child Death review and Prevention Committee. He is now the Deputy Director of Adolescent Medicine at the Royal Children's Hospital in Melbourne.

Dr Roseby was Chair of the Royal Australasian College of Physicians (RACP) Northern Territory Committee from 2006 to 2008. He has been a member of committees overseeing the education of paediatricians and policy development, he is a member of the RACP paediatric division education committee and chairs a committee assessing overseas trained specialists. He has served on several national and state advisory committees.

Dr Roseby has numerous peer review publications including two systematic reviews of scientific literature. He has contributed to several reports and given about 50 conference presentations. He is a passionate advocate for Aboriginal health and wellbeing, particularly children and adolescents.

During the Inquiry Dr Roseby is taking leave from his position at the Royal Children's Hospital in Melbourne.

Dr Howard Bath

Dr Howard Bath was appointed the Northern Territory Children's Commissioner in June 2008. Trained as a Clinical Psychologist, Dr Bath has studied and worked in both Australia and the USA. He has worked as a youth worker, manager, agency director and clinician and was the inaugural Chair of the Child and Family Welfare Association of Australia, the peak body for service providers representing all states and territories.

Dr Bath has presented widely at conferences and training seminars and has authored numerous research reports and articles on topics including family preservation services, out-of-home care, behaviour management and child protection.

From 1999 to 2008 he was Director of the Thomas Wright Institute in Canberra which provides a range of consultancy, training and clinical services for organisations working with young clients with complex needs and challenging behaviours.

His clinical interests have included work with young people who have experienced developmental trauma, problems around aggression and sexuality, and developmental disorders such as autism. He has had a long-standing interest in and involvement with children in the care and protection system.

During the Inquiry into the Child Protection system he will take leave from his position as Children's Commissioner.