



**Centre for Excellence
in Child and Family Welfare Inc.**

Media release

Tuesday 7 June 2011 – for immediate release

Step in early to reduce harm to Morwell children, welfare peak tells Inquiry

The peak body for child and family services in Victoria is calling on the Victorian Government to substantially boost support for early intervention services that could prevent children and young people needing child protection to ensure their safety and wellbeing.

The call comes as Morwell hosts the fourth regional public sitting of the Baillieu Government's Protecting Victoria's Vulnerable Children Inquiry (PVVCI) tomorrow, Wednesday 8 June.

Dr Lynette Buoy, chief executive of the Centre for Excellence in Child and Family Welfare, said recent budget announcements and a report just released by the Department of Human Services on the child protection workforce showed too great a focus on late-stage, acute interventions.

Instead, with more resources, Dr Buoy said child and family services that are currently poorly funded could intervene much earlier to stop harm accumulating in young and vulnerable lives.

"The DHS report is silent on resources for these services. We need some balance in the system, and funding the acute end of services is really like funding intensive care without asking how to prevent people arriving there.

"On an economic level, a preventative approach is less expensive in the longer term, though improved outcomes for children must always come first," Dr Buoy said.

She noted the timing of the Department's report before the Morwell sitting of the Inquiry appeared to anticipate criticism of the child protection system in a region that has been a focal point for problems identified by the Victorian Ombudsman, including vulnerable children who have not been given a case-worker.

"While we need to better resource early intervention and prevention, the Centre's submission to the Inquiry has also proposed an alternative child protection model from the one described in the Department's report, *Child protection: a case for change*.

"We propose that the statutory obligation of guardianship of children in State care be removed from the Department, which would retain responsibility for child protection

investigations. Guardianship would instead reside with an Independent Office of the Children's and Young Persons' Guardian, creating stronger transparency around whether we are meeting the true needs of children and families, including children in State care, while they are in care," Dr Buoy said.

"As community services minister Mary Wooldridge has identified, the administrative burden on child protection workers is certainly an issue that should be addressed, but it's far from the only issue, as our submission to the Inquiry makes very clear," she noted.

While Dr Buoy welcomed the Department's consultation with its own child protection workers in producing its report, she said there was also a need for the public forum of the Inquiry to hear from former workers across the whole system, including child protection.

"We need as many perspectives as possible to be offered in the public forum of the Inquiry to challenge existing views," Dr Buoy said.

The Morwell sitting of the Inquiry coincides with the Equal Pay National Day of Action organised by the Australian Services Union, which is calling for fairer pay for the community sector workforce.

"The ASU campaign is important to this Inquiry because poorly paid community sector workers deliver the services that make it possible to intervene earlier in the lives of at-risk children and young people, and to meet their needs if they have to be in State care," Dr Buoy said.

The Inquiry will convene at Morwell Football and Netball Club, Travers Street, Morwell from 10.00am. Verbal submissions will be heard by Chair and former Supreme Court of Victoria Judge, Philip Cummins, Professor Dorothy Scott, and Mr Bill Scales.

Announced by the Premier on 31 January, the Inquiry will report to Parliament in November. It will: "investigate systemic problems in Victoria's child protection system and make recommendations to strengthen and improve the protection and support of vulnerable young Victorians", according to the official Inquiry website, www.childprotectioninquiry.vic.gov.au

The Centre for Excellence Inquiry website for the community sector is at www.theiroutcomesmatter.org . Related Twitter posts are hashtagged #pvvci.

The DHS report on the child protection workforce, *Child protection: a case for change*, is available here:

<http://www.cyf.vic.gov.au/home/child-protection-a-case-for-change>

For interview:
Dr Lynette Buoy
Chief Executive Officer
Mobile: 0407 702 975

Media inquiries:
Darren Lewin-Hill
Media & Communications Coordinator
Mobile: 0404 526 555