

“Bureaucratic Bungling Protected!”

DHS Victoria goes in pursuit of whistleblowers ([LINK](#))

by Richard Baker and Nick McKenzie of The Age Investigation Unit – September 20, 2012

This Victorian government is spending thousands of dollars hunting whistleblowers behind leaks about the abuse of disabled people in state care, and the alleged cover-ups.

The Department of Human Services has engaged a forensic investigatory firm, [McGrathNicol](#), to trace the source of leaks to *The Age* this year.

These had led to a report revealing that 112 alleged serious "staff-to-client abuse" incidents had occurred in 2011-12, and allegations that internal documents had been altered to conceal information.

While chasing whistleblowers, the department has been accused by staff of burying the findings of a report on a senior manager's handling of the alleged sexual abuse of a disabled adult male by his carer last year.

The manager has been accused of failing to act on staff reports of the alleged abuse.

The Age has confirmed that the department also failed to inform the alleged victim's family and police of an incident last year in which a male carer pulled down a disabled man's pants in front of other residents.

The male carer also allegedly stuffed cash down his own pants and asked other staff and residents to remove it.

The carer and manager accused of failing to act on reports of the incident last year are believed to have both been stood down on full pay.

The father of the alleged victim, yesterday told *The Age* he was not told of the April 2011 incident until May this year. Department protocols require families to be immediately notified of any incidents. He also claims a senior department manager recently asked him if he would consider "wiping the slate clean" regarding the incident involving his 53-year-old son.

Despite his son being questioned several months ago by an external investigator, he said neither he nor his son had been advised of the results of the inquiry.

"They won't tell me anything, " he said. "They are keeping it all hush-hush." Department insiders told *The Age* of their shock that managers would go after the people responsible for exposing adverse incidents.

"It shows you where the priority is," one said.

Opposition health spokesman Gavin Jennings said bringing in investigators to trace the leaks was "a classic case of going in the wrong direction".

"The department has a duty of care, and when it is exposed of falling short of that duty, it should confront the problem, not cover it up," he said.

The treatment of the disabled in state-funded care has become a high-profile issue for the government after *The Age* revealed in June that a former Yooralla worker had been charged with dozens of sexual assaults.

In response to questions from *The Age*, the department last night said in a statement: "The department has statutory and legal obligations to ensure quality of care for disabled clients. If there are allegations this is not taking place, the department needs to understand why important information relating to client care is not getting through to senior management. It needs to speak to the person involved.

"Further, **the** department takes breaches of the Victorian Public Service code of conduct and client privacy seriously."

A report on the incident involving **the** son is expected to be completed soon.

Know more on this story? investigations@theage.com.au

LISA Comment: This is nothing really surprising, as this totally out-of-control state government department has been a law-unto-itself since time immemorial.

Government departments are instigated, regulated and funded by government. Therefore, it is the responsibility of government to direct and control these departments where the public are identifying service level and quality concerns. But they don't!

Successive state governments have placed the need for effective control of this very complex human services department in the too hard basket. They have totally failed to ensure the department is properly and proactively managing its business in accordance with its policies, standards and good business practice.

The establishment of the *Disability Services Commissioner* as a disability service complaints investigation body, was a token gesture by one state government, as the department (DHS/DS) ensured the commissioner's teeth were pulled prior to appointment.

The department's defences against consistent and meaningful service accountability, transparency and customer service is far better than the green zone in Baghdad.

Extra 1: "Who Corrects the Actions of Government Departments if not Government?"

Extra 2: The Disability Services Commissioner was established to work with people with a disability and disability service providers to resolve complaints. This is one model being considered by governments for how reviews and complaints could be handled under the NDIS. What might these mean in practice? We suggest little more than the present, unless the Commissioner gets some teeth!

Extra 3: Jenny Macklin [press release](#) - disability services

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