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**STAFFING LEVELS MUST MEET NEEDS**

The 68\% increase in suspected child abuse notifications across the Northern Territory during the last financial year has not been matched by an increase in the number of cases being investigated.

Shadow Minister for Child Protection, Jodeen Carney, said figures contained in the Department of Health and Families annual report show the number of notifications of suspected child abuse went from 3668 in 2007-08 to 6190 in 2008-09.

In contrast the number of cases investigated by child protection workers increased by just 20\%, going from 1970 in 2007-08 to 2370 last financial year.

It’s disturbing that of the 2370 cases investigated, 819 cases of child abuse were identified.

“This indicates the number of child protection workers is still well short of that required to adequately investigate reports of child abuse,” Ms Carney said.

“During Estimates Committee hearings in June, Child Protection Minister Malarndirri McCarthy admitted the number of Child Abuse Taskforce workers had stayed at three; that the Mobile Child Protection Unit had gone from 10 workers to 6 and that in the 12 months to July, only 8 additional child protection workers had been employed.

“While Ms McCarthy told the Assembly today an extra 54 staff had been recruited to the Families and Children division in the 12 months to July 2009, she failed to say how many of those were on the front-line protecting the
interests of children and, anyway, that falls considerably short of attending to the 68% increase in notifications.”

Ms Carney also said it was also disappointing the Government had fallen well short of meeting its own child harm investigation performance measures.

The annual report shows that 1 day, 3 day and 5 day assessments all fell well short of the Government’s own targets.

“It’s not good enough that only 23% of Category 3 cases were investigated within 5 days,” Ms Carney said.

“Despite the protests of the Minister, this says to me that there are serious resourcing issues within Families and Children.”

Further comment: Jodeen Carney 0407 187 992