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MEDIA RELEASE

Government urged to tackle 42 per cent increase in child abuse and neglect

A 42 per cent increase in the number of abused and neglected children over the past decade has prompted some of Australia's most prominent welfare organisations to push for Federal involvement in tackling the problem.

The Chief Executive Officer of Families Australia, Ms Anne-Marie Mioche, says that in 1991-1992, there were 21,371 substantiated cases of child abuse and neglect. By 2001-02, that figure had increased to 30,473, an increase of more than 9000, or 42 per cent.

"The fact the States are not able to stem the increase in child abuse makes it an issue of national concern," says Ms Mioche. "Without a concerted national effort to tackle child abuse and neglect, thirty years from now a generation will again be asking why they were not protected."

Families Australia and another 28 welfare organisations, including the Australian Council of Social Service and Early Childhood Australia, have developed a six point plan to tackle the problem of child abuse and neglect.

The plan includes the development of a national strategy to prevent abuse, similar to the National Drug Strategy, as well as the development of a national network of Family Centres. The Centres would better coordinate Commonwealth services already focused on the family and identify and support children and families vulnerable to abuse.

"We're appealing to the Prime Minister to swing the full power of Commonwealth behind this effort," says Ms Mioche. "We know there are no easy solutions, but a whole of government approach is clearly needed to tackle the problem."

She says that 30 years ago, the main drivers of child abuse were essentially economic. These days there are several prime causes, including substance abuse, mental illness, and the increasing number of single parent families.

Ms Mioche says greater Commonwealth involvement in child welfare would fit well with the Federal Government's early childhood agenda and its strong focus on families and community.

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