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MEDIA RELEASE

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NEW TASKFORCE TO PROTECT VULNERABLE CHILDREN

A new child protection taskforce will work to prevent vulnerable children slipping through the cracks, by better coordinating services and support throughout the lockdown and beyond.

Minister for Families, Communities and Disability Services Alister Henskens said the *Child Wellbeing Taskforce* would bring together NSW Government agencies and non-government sector leaders, to develop a plan for the transition out of lockdown.

“When it comes to protecting children, everybody has a role to play, and this Taskforce will ensure a coordinated effort to improve services and support for those most vulnerable,” Mr Henskens said.

“We’ve worked hard throughout the lockdown to ensure continuity of services and support for at-risk children, but we also recognise that this difficult time may have adversely affected some children and young people.

“The Taskforce will develop a plan for the road ahead that focuses on the wellbeing of children and young people as we transition out of lockdown.”

The Child Wellbeing Taskforce will include representatives from the Department of Communities and Justice, Department of Education and sector peak organisations.

The initial focus will be promoting awareness of child abuse and neglect to all frontline workers, improving access to digital devices and internet for at-risk families and enhancing support for young people exiting out-of-home care.

Minister for Education and Early Childhood Learning Sarah Mitchell said teachers play an important role in the child protection system.

“As frontline workers, it’s important teachers know what to look out for and how to respond when they see something that is not right,” Ms Mitchell said.

“The NSW Government is taking a holistic approach to supporting children during this difficult time, mental health and wellbeing support is also front and centre for students.

“The new Taskforce will help a range of front-line staff, including teachers, identify those at-risk and connect them to support.”

Association of Children’s Welfare Agencies (ACWA) CEO Steve Kinmond said ACWA was pleased to support the NSW Government’s establishment of the taskforce.

“We have no doubt that only a strong partnership between government agencies and the non-government sector will deliver the best outcomes for vulnerable children and families,” Mr Kinmond said.

“In order to enhance the educational opportunities for vulnerable children, we need educators, community service agencies and other key stakeholders, to work in lockstep with each other, in providing all children the with best education possible, both during COVID and beyond.”

The Child Wellbeing Taskforce will meet for the first time next week.