



## Department of Health

Secretary

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- 7 JAN 2013

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Mr Mark Roberts  
Coroner's Registrar  
Coroners Court of Victoria  
Level 11, 222 Exhibition Street  
MELBOURNE VIC 3000



Dear Mr Roberts

**Re: Investigation into the death of Rebecca Lazarus (court ref: COR 2007 002529)**

I refer to your letter dated 19 November 2012 detailing the findings and recommendation in respect to the death of Ms Rebecca Lazarus, a former resident of Hazelwood Supported Residential Service (SRS).

As noted in the Coroner's report, SRS are privately operated businesses that are registered with and regulated by the department. The resident profile and size of individual SRS vary.

The department takes seriously all allegations of serious physical or sexual assault, including family violence, in SRS. The new *Supported Residential Services (Private Proprietors) Act 2010* introduced a number of reforms that provide additional protections for residents and strengthened the requirements on proprietors to protect resident safety and wellbeing. Proprietors are responsible for keeping a central record of any incident that threatens the safety of a resident or staff, and it is mandatory for proprietors to report serious incidents including injury and/or assault of a resident to the department.

In congruence with our stance on the protection of residents, the department wishes to advise that it will implement the following recommendation made by Coroner Coate:

*To continue to develop the skill and knowledge of staff and proprietors of supported residential services, and enhance the support provided to residents of these services, I recommend that the Department of Health, in consultation with the Domestic Violence Resource Centre (Vic) and Women with Disabilities Victoria, incorporate a family violence training module into the current supported residential service training schedule. This should involve a specific focus on the impact and effects of family violence in relation to people with disabilities. Development and delivery of this training should occur in consultation with these specialist family violence and disability organisations.*

The recommendation is timely, as the department is currently concluding a project to review and redevelop the existing SRS proprietor and staff training program. There is capacity to integrate a family violence training component into this training redevelopment project, with the view to the new training being available to SRS proprietors and staff in 2013-14 and beyond.

As per the Coroner's recommendation, on 18 December 2012 staff from the Department of Health SRS and Accommodation Support Unit met with the Domestic Violence Resource Centre (Vic) and Women with Disabilities Victoria in order to discuss the proposed strategy for achieving the Coroner's recommendation to develop the skill and knowledge of staff and proprietors of SRS about family violence.

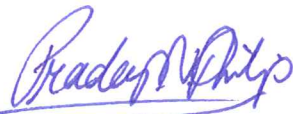
The department already funds a training program<sup>1</sup> for SRS proprietors and staff in such areas as support planning and managing challenging behaviours, including aggression and violence. A specific chapter on training on family violence in an SRS setting will be incorporated and offered as part of the annual SRS training program into the future. The content of this training will draw on the expert knowledge and resources available through the Domestic Violence Resource Centre (Vic) and Women with Disabilities Victoria. Awareness and training in family violence issues in SRS and for women with disabilities will be embedded into relevant SRS training developments.

Material regarding family violence will be incorporated into Authorised Officer<sup>2</sup> training, in order to increase their awareness of family violence, improve their knowledge about resources available for assistance or referral, and assist them in offering support to proprietors to meet their legislative obligations to resident safety. In addition, we will be giving consideration on how best to provide information to residents about the services available for assistance and advice in relation to family violence. It is envisaged that this will be a multi-faceted approach including information provided by SRS proprietors and senior staff, Authorised Officers and Community Visitors. We will work with Supporting Connections<sup>3</sup> workers to discuss their role in assisting residents, as they are well placed to connect residents with information and services they might need.

The proposed strategy will also incorporate an immediate information awareness component, via the SRS newsletter<sup>4</sup> which is distributed to all SRS proprietors and staff. It will provide information on family violence in an SRS setting, advice on indicators and risk factors for family violence, and contacts for further information and assistance. All proprietors will be reminded of their responsibilities under the legislation with regard to the safety and wellbeing of all residents.

If you have any queries regarding this letter, please do not hesitate to contact Dean Raven, Manager Residential Services at [dean.raven@health.vic.gov.au](mailto:dean.raven@health.vic.gov.au), telephone (03) 9096 7581.

Yours sincerely



**Dr Pradeep Philip**  
Secretary

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<sup>1</sup> The current SRS training calendar can be accessed at <http://vic.lasa.asn.au/training-and-consultancy/srs-training/>

<sup>2</sup> Authorised Officers are appointed under the *Supported Residential Services (Private Proprietors) Act 2010* and monitor and enforce compliance with the Act and the Regulations through inspections, complaint investigation and providing advice and education to proprietors.

<sup>3</sup> Supporting Connections is part of the Supporting Accommodation for Vulnerable Victorians Initiative (SAVVI), which was introduced in 2007 to support pension-level SRS. Supporting Connections workers work with pension-level SRS proprietors to build proprietor capacity to identify resident need, improve support planning, assist in better management of challenging behaviours and strengthen links to local services.

<sup>4</sup> Newsletters can be downloaded at <http://www.health.vic.gov.au/srs/resources/newsletters.htm>