

Chief Executive  
Level 4  
87 Mitchell Street Darwin NT 0801  
**Postal Address:** PO Box 40596  
CASUARINA NT 0811  
**Tel:** 08 8999 2761  
**Fax:** 08 8999 2800  
**eMail:** [david.ashbridge@nt.gov.au](mailto:david.ashbridge@nt.gov.au)

**Our Ref:** DF2009/4121  
**Your Ref:**

Dear Registered Health Practitioner,

**RE: Changed Reporting Responsibilities Regarding Suspected Harm and Exploitation of Children**

I am writing to advise you of an amendment to the *Care and Protection of Children Act* (the Act) which affects your obligations to report suspected harm and exploitation of children. The amendment took effect on 1 September 2009.

Section 26 of the Act now imposes a legal responsibility on every person in the Northern Territory (NT) to report a reasonable belief that a child has been or is likely to be abused or neglected, or has been or is likely to be a victim of a sexual offence.

Under the amended Section 26 everyone is required to report:

- Any child aged less than 18 years who has suffered or is likely to suffer harm or exploitation.
- Any child aged less than 14 years who has been or is likely to be a victim of a sexual offence.
- Any child aged less than 18 years who has been or is likely to be a victim of a sexual offence occurring in the context of a special care relationship. A special care relationship is one where an adult has formed a personal relationship with a child in connection with the child's care, supervision, or instruction.

Registered health practitioners in the NT have an **additional** responsibility to notify the Department of Health and Families or the Police if they believe on reasonable grounds that:

- A child aged 14 or 15 years has been or is likely to be a victim of a sexual offence and the age difference between the child and the sexual offender is greater than 2 years.

Registered health practitioners include Aboriginal health workers, chiropractors, dentists, dental hygienists, dental prosthetists, dental specialists, dental therapists, medical practitioners, midwives, registered nurses authorised to practise midwifery, Registered and Enrolled nurses, occupational therapists, optometrists, osteopaths, pharmacists, radiographers, physiotherapists and psychologists.

The amendments followed extensive consultation with a range of professional groups, including lawyers and medical practitioners, who were concerned that the then-law may have the unintended consequence of discouraging sexually active young people from seeking confidential advice and care on medical, psychological and other issues relating to sexual health matters.

Further information on the new reporting obligations is available on the internet at:

[http://www.health.nt.gov.au/Children\\_Youth\\_and\\_Families/Child\\_Protection/Sexual\\_Offences\\_Involving\\_Children/index.aspx](http://www.health.nt.gov.au/Children_Youth_and_Families/Child_Protection/Sexual_Offences_Involving_Children/index.aspx)

Child protection reports should be made to the NT Families and Children Central Intake Team on 1800 700 250 which is a 24-hour number staffed by professional child protection workers.

Yours sincerely

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'David Ashbridge', written in a cursive style.

David Ashbridge  
10 September 2009