

**MEDIA RELEASE**

Strictly embargoed until 12:01am  
**June 1, 2009**

## **Financial crisis leads to child abuse increase**

The number of child victims of abuse and domestic violence will jump by at least ten per cent in the next 12 months due to the recession, Australian Childhood Foundation CEO Dr Joe Tucci warned today.

The warning comes as the leading child protection agency reported a 15 to 20 per cent spike in the number of referrals to their child abuse counselling service in the past month.

Dr Tucci feared child abuse cases would increase in the next 12 months as the global financial crisis pushes Australian families to breaking point.

"In fact, a ten per cent increase is a conservative figure. Unfortunately evidence tells us economic trouble is one of the leading triggers for child abuse and family violence," he said.

Recent Victoria Police figures show almost 1100 family violence orders had been issued in the four months to mid-April this year. The Crime Department has warned that as families succumb to financial stress, the likelihood of family violence increases.

Attorney-General Robert McClelland said an increase in the number of divorces and family breakdowns is an inevitable result of increased monetary pressure.

Dr Tucci launched the Foundation's 2009 Childhood Hero national fundraising appeal today. He called on all Australians to be vigilant in ensuring children do not become the forgotten victims of the global financial crisis.

"Everyone is responsible for protecting children. We urge the community and Government to be on high alert for child abuse and family violence and encourage people to offer support to struggling friends, family and neighbours who may be at risk," he said.

Dr Tucci also renewed calls for national uniform child abuse reporting laws, saying the current state-based reporting system was inadequate for measuring the full extent of child abuse across Australia.

"Financial pressures can lead to child abuse in many ways. An increase in stress can see parents neglecting their children or taking out their frustrations physically on their children. Children are increasingly exposed to violent family situations," Dr Tucci warned.

"With an escalation in financial pressure, more children will find themselves in a home environment that is emotionally charged, potentially involving alcohol, and probably resulting in verbal or physical violence," he said.

"When parents are stressed they can focus on the causes of the stress rather than focus on the needs of their children. This leaves children more vulnerable to neglect."

As almost all Australian families are being hit hard by the recession, Dr Tucci said there is no profile of a 'typical' family at risk of child abuse.

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“Job-losses and forced reduction in work hours is happening across all industry sectors and people of all socio-economic backgrounds are facing financial and family stress,” he said.

Parents should not wait until crisis point to seek help and support from family, friends and support services or even their local GP, Dr Tucci said.

“There is often a sense of stigma and shame associated with asking for help. In fact this is a time when people will understand and want to help the most,” he said.

“I appeal to parents: if you feel like things are getting on top of you, get some support now because it will benefit you and protect your children.”

The Australian Childhood Foundation is national not for profit organisation that provides specialist trauma counselling to child victims of abuse, as well as providing education, prevention and research programs.

The Foundation’s Childhood Hero Appeal runs for the month of June to raise money to provide specialist counselling services to help children recover from abuse.

Childhood Hero Day, a national initiative that asks the community to donate and fundraise on behalf of the Foundation, will be held on June 19. Primary school children throughout Australia will dress up as their hero to raise money for the Foundation and their school on Childhood Hero Day.

To make a donation to the Childhood Hero Appeal, call 1800 176 453 or via [www.childhood.org.au](http://www.childhood.org.au)

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