

# Alarm at disabled assaults

CLAIMS that six disabled Victorians have suffered horrifying assaults in the past 10 weeks could see sweeping new powers handed to Victoria's Public Advocate.

The *Herald Sun* can reveal that 11 formal notifications detailing allegations of physical abuse, severe injury, sexual exploitation and sexual assault against the most vulnerable residents are being examined by the Public Advocate's office — including six cases already this year.

Last week the Department of Human Services was found to have covered up the assault of a severely disabled Croydon man by his DHS carer for more than two years in the face of a Public Advocate's fight to have the matter investigated.

With fears of other assaults being swept under the carpet, the State Gov-

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ernment is considering handing Victoria's Public Advocate, Colleen Pearce, a raft of new powers to investigate allegations of assault or neglect against the disabled and elderly.

The changes would effectively make Ms Pearce a disability services regulator with the power to pursue fines through the courts or refer matters to police.

With shocking assault claims made daily to her office, Ms Pearce said the need for investigative powers was paramount.

A Victorian Law Reform Commission consultation paper was released yesterday outlining proposed changes to beef up protection for 80,000 Victorians with mental impairment.

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