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## Police investigate sex assault at care home

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VICTORIAN detectives are investigating the alleged sexual assault of a mentally ill woman at a state-monitored care home, as the Brumby Government refused to launch its own probe into reports of rape raised by the Public Advocate.

The revelation comes a day after the state's disability watchdog, Colleen Pearce, said reports of rape and sexual assault in the state-monitored supported accommodation were the product of years of government neglect and underfunding.

In response to the comments by Ms Pearce, who heads the Office of the Public Advocate, Attorney-General Rob Hulls emphasised the reports were anecdotal and that specific allegations should be referred to and investigated by police.

When asked whether she was aware of any specific cases of sexual abuse or exploitation in state homes, Community Services Minister Lisa Neville said on Monday that she had heard about broad concerns and had urged the Public Advocate to pass on any specific cases.

But *The Age* can reveal that detectives from a suburban police station have spent several months investigating allegations that a director of a care home sexually assaulted a female resident, believed to be in her 40s.

The Department of Human Services - which Ms Neville oversees - has been briefed by police about the case and was in contact with police yesterday to discuss it again.

Detectives have interviewed at least three people, including the alleged offender, who is a director and works at the care home - one of the state's 181 supported residential services, which provide for-profit, low-level care for thousands of disabled, mentally ill and elderly Victorians.

Labor's refusal to launch a special investigation into the Public Advocate's claims of neglect and abuse in the state-monitored homes came after Ms Pearce said the State Government and the department had ignored years of serious complaints and offered only a "Band-Aid solution" in response to the concerns.

Mr Hulls said the allegations were disturbing and that known offences should be reported to the police. "The Public Advocate has made it clear that a lot of the material that has been put forward is anecdotal and that's because of the difficult circumstances in relation to some of the allegations whereby there has been no proof offered up," he said.

When asked if she had heard about specific cases of sexual abuse or exploitation, Ms Neville told *The Age* on Monday: "The Office of the Public Advocate have raised them in a broad way, so it has said that we have got concerns about women.

"I have encouraged them to bring to me any individual issues or to the department any individual issues so that we can address or support those individuals."

But last night, in response to questions from *The Age* about the alleged sexual assault, Ms Neville said she had been made aware by her department in March of an allegation "that a resident at a privately operated facility had consensual sexual intercourse with a male staff member".

She said the matter was referred to police and the resident moved to another facility. The care home had been inspected 14 times since the allegation was made.

As the Opposition again called for Ms Neville to be sacked and a judicial inquiry into the recent allegations, women's advocacy groups yesterday commended the Public Advocate for highlighting alleged sexual exploitation of women in state-monitored care homes.

A man who has lived in state-monitored care homes since 2004 said many people in such homes were reluctant to come forward. "Everybody shuts up and if you don't shut up, they kick you out," he said.

"Gary", who has bipolar disorder and a muscle disease, said he was once punched and attacked in his bedroom. On two other occasions he was lying in bed when he was approached by a man wanting to engage in oral sex.

Despite locks, privacy and safety were always problematic, he said, because people found a way into your bedroom.

With **DAVID ROOD**

*This story was found at: <http://www.theage.com.au/national/police-investigate-sex-assault-at-care-home-20090924-g4p8.html>*