

Media release

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Independent committee reports on Qld child deaths

Queensland's independent Child Death Case Review Committee has released its first annual report on the Department of Child Safety's involvement with children who have died, where they were known to the department within three years of their deaths.

The committee was established following recommendations by the CMC inquiry into the abuse of children in foster care.

The report covers eight cases finalised by the committee in the 2004-05 financial year.

Committee Chair, Commissioner for Children and Young People and Child Guardian Elizabeth Fraser said the report is an essential part of and contributes to the reform of the child protection system.

Of these cases (involving nine deaths), four children died from illness or disease, four from accidental causes including drowning, fire and car accidents and one death was attributed to Sudden Infant Death Syndrome (SIDS).

Ms Fraser said given the timeframes the report covers, it not surprisingly identifies some systemic issues about services to children and young people which have already been endorsed for action in the government's response to the CMC inquiry.

These include the quality of risk assessments, record keeping and interagency cooperation by the Department of Child Safety, which were attributed to heavy workloads, staffing issues and poor information management systems.

The Commissioner said recent reforms in child safety are expected to address the issues identified.

"The committee's ongoing feedback and recommendations should help the department focus its reform activities.

"The review process is also an important step for the Department of Child Safety to promote individual accountability, and the reviews are expected to be a valuable learning tool for individual staff.

"In the coming year, the committee hopes to see signs of positive systemic change due to improvements in legislation, information sharing, management and resources."

Next year's annual report will include information about the department's actions in response to the committee's recommendations.

The committee was established on 1 August 2004, so only deaths occurring after this date have been reviewed for this first report. The department has six months from the time of a child's death to provide the committee with its report and departmental records of its involvement with the child.

The review committee has the power to ask the Director-General of Child Safety whether steps have been taken to implement its recommendations within a reasonable time.

If the committee isn't satisfied with the department's response to its recommendations, it can provide its report to the Premier and the Minister for the Department of Child Safety for action.

"This is a real step forward in improving the accountability and effectiveness of the child protection system in Queensland," the Commissioner said.

The review committee is a multi-disciplinary committee which is independent of the Department of Child Safety. Its members are professionals with expertise in child-related fields, including:

- Robert Atkinson (Commissioner of Police)
- Michael Barnes (State Coroner)
- Dr Colin Brennan (Psychiatrist)
- McRose Elu (Torres Strait Islander Representative)
- Assistant Commissioner, Commission for Children and Young People and Child Guardian, Barry Salmon.
- Trudi Sebasio (Aboriginal representative)
- Neil Wigg (paediatrician)
- Jennifer Wiltshire (Social Work Consultant)

The Commissioner also took the opportunity to express her condolences and those of other committee members to the families and friends of the children whose cases have come before the committee.

"The death of a child is a particular tragedy which impacts on all those involved in that child's life, including child protection professionals," she said.