



commission for
children and young people
and child guardian

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Media release

Commission recommendations to reduce child deaths

The Commission for Children and Young People and Child Guardian has released its first-ever report reviewing the causes of child deaths in Queensland and making recommendations aiming to reduce future deaths.

The inaugural report analyses the trends and patterns of 693 child deaths in Queensland between 1 January 2004 and 30 June 2005, and makes three key recommendations on the issues identified, to:

- promote safe sleeping practices for infants to reduce the rate of sudden unexpected deaths in infancy
- refer the issue of low-speed driveway run-overs to the Parliamentary Travelsafe Committee, and
- better manage risks around rural hazards to children and young people, including dams and all terrain vehicles (or quad bikes).

The Commissioner Elizabeth Fraser also expressed deep concern about the young age at which Queensland children are tragically taking their own lives, with 19 children (13 males and six females) dying in this period, with nine between 10 and 14 years.

“The Commission will work with key agencies in 2005-06 on strategies to prevent childhood suicide,” the Commissioner said.

In addition, there were 63 sudden unexpected deaths of infants in Queensland, including 21 from SIDS, in the 18 months from January 2004 to June 2005.

Ms Fraser said the report identifies a need to provide parents with accurate information about safeguards which can be put in place when sharing a bed with their babies.

“While this is a complex area and there is conflicting evidence about risks and benefits, research shows up to 45% of mothers share beds with their babies, and the practice is more common in Indigenous families,” she said.

“Bed-sharing has benefits such as reduced crying, better sleep for the mother and the baby and increased breast feeding.

“But recent evidence shows the risk of sudden death doubles where the infant sleeps with a mother who smokes, although it’s unclear why.

“There’s also the possibility of the infant being accidentally suffocated - this risk may be increased if the parent is affected by alcohol or drugs, or there are other hazards in the sleeping environment such as loose or heavy bedding.”

The Commissioner recommended that Queensland Health develop a statewide policy on safe sleeping practices, taking into account cultural practices, so parents know what safeguards to take so infants can sleep safely when sharing a bed.

Queensland Health Minister Steven Robertson supports the recommendations.

“In response, the department has recently developed new guidelines in consultation with experts from the SIDS field and SIDS and Kids, to help health staff and parents reduce the risk of infant death,” he said.

Commissioner Elizabeth Fraser said the issue of low-speed runovers leading to the deaths of toddlers aged one to four years in driveways was also identified in the report as a worrying trend.

Ms Fraser said toddlers are at particular risk, as they are hard to see and are not yet aware of personal safety.

“People appear to underestimate the risks to children of slow moving vehicles in the driveway and the surrounding yard,” she said.

“Eight children under four died in the 18 month period we looked at, with six of these deaths involving a car being reversed out of the driveway of a home by a family member or friend.

“I believe the Travelsafe Committee is well placed to take a lead role in identifying ways to help the community prevent such fatalities.”

Finally, the Commission’s report recommends the government note potential risks to children and young people in Queensland from rural hazards such as drowning in dams and injuries and fatalities caused by accidents on quad bikes.

The Commissioner said she was particularly concerned that all fatalities concerning quad bikes involved children under twelve, including two children under five. Industry guidelines state children under 16 should not ride adult-sized quad bikes and riders must always wear a helmet.

“I would like to see the government note the Commission’s findings and its intention to encourage agencies to explore strategies to better manage these risks.

“The Commission will report back on progress in this area in 2005-06.

“The blurring of home and work domains, and the issue of supervision on the farm are areas which could be investigated further.

“I would also like to like to put forward the creation of ‘play safe areas’ currently being promoted by Farmsafe Australia for consideration as a possible practical strategy to address these issues.”

The Commission’s report is available online at www.ccypcg.qld.gov.au

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