

Government response to the Queensland Family and Child Commission systems review summary report - *Seeking safety, Keeping children safe when they remain at home during Child Safety interventions. A system review following the deaths of two young children*

The Queensland Family and Child Commission (QFCC) was established on 1 July 2014 under the *Family and Child Commission Act 2014* (FCC Act) and has important statutory functions to oversee the child protection system and to review policies and practices at a system level. Systems reviews following the death of a child are now conducted by the independent Child Death Review Board established in 2020.

The QFCC was asked to carry out systems reviews to assess the adequacy and effectiveness of agency responses, and to make recommendations aimed at improving the child protection system.

The QFCC provided the Queensland Government with a review report which included findings and identified key issues for further review to improve policies and procedures within the child and family support system. Given the nature of the incident, the review is considered sensitive and contains confidential information about the individuals involved.

In the interests of upholding the Government's commitment to transparency and accountability, while respecting the right to privacy and confidentiality, the following summary report has been tabled:

- *Seeking safety, Keeping children safe when they remain at home during Child Safety interventions. A system review following the deaths of two young children*

The death or serious harm of any child is a tragedy, and the Government supports the important findings of the systems review and the underlying objective of the issues for further review for systems improvements. Accordingly, the Queensland Government accepts all three recommendations made by the QFCC and has already implemented them in full or in part.

Two recommendations were made in relation to keeping children safe at home during intervention with parental agreement (IPA).

1. Recommendation one is completed. *The Department of Child Safety, Youth and Women takes immediate action to eliminate practice non-compliance within the Child Safety Service Centre that dealt with the case to make sure all children on current IPAs are safe.*

The Department of Children, Youth Justice and Multicultural Affairs (DCYJMA) undertook a compliance audit of the Logan Child Safety Service Centre. As a result of the audit, DCYJMA has reviewed and updated the practice guidance for all staff regarding IPA cases.

2. Recommendation two is completed. *The Queensland Family and Child Commission immediately commences a review into the safety of children during interventions with parental agreements (IPAs).*

At a minimum, this review must:

- i. include a sample of cases from each Child Safety region in the state in which a child had been assessed as in need of protection more than 30 days prior*
- ii. examine safety and case planning guidelines and practices, including changes needed to make sure children returned to their parents' care have a current case plan*
- iii. examine established practices for drug testing parents who use ice and engaging them in treatment and supports*
- iv. determine how to monitor whether or not a parent is maintaining engagement with secondary services*

v. recommend improvements to strengthen assessment and reassessment of whether or not an IPA is/ remains appropriate.

A review report is to be published by the QFCC as soon as practicable

In February 2023 the QFCC released its report on the review of IPAs: *Keeping children in focus- a systemic review of supports delivered to Queensland children and families during Intervention with Parental Agreement*. Findings focused on sector capacity, need for flexibility, resourcing to community-controlled organisations and analysis of outcomes for children. DCYJMA is working through relevant findings.

A third recommendation related to the sharing of information between Queensland Government agencies.

3. We recommend the Department of Child Safety, Youth and Women and Queensland Health commit to better assist professionals in making decisions in the best interests of children under the Child Protection Act 1999 (Qld) by:

Recommendation 3.1 is completed. *3.1. Revising Queensland Health child protection policies and guidelines to require use of the Child Protection Guide when making decisions to refer families for support or report concerns to Child Safety*

Recommendation 3.2 is underway. *3.2. Revising its Child Safety Officer – Health Liaison booklet to:*

- i. require the Child Safety Officer (Health Liaison) to refer professionals to existing referral and reporting processes (including the Child Protection Guide)*
- ii. require the Child Safety Officer (Health Liaison) to provide relevant advice, within delegated authority, to help inform referral or reports, including information about a family's history of non-engagement with supports*
- iii. include information relevant to assessing or responding to the health needs of a child at risk of harm or in need of protection, resulting from circumstances such as parent's use of ice or other drugs.*

Recommendation 3.1 - Queensland Health and DCYJMA each made changes in response to this recommendation.

Queensland Health has revised its child protection policies and guidelines to advise of the Child Protection Guide when making decisions to refer families for support or report concerns to DCYJMA (Child Safety). This includes revision of the following policies and operational guidance:

- *Reporting concerns of child abuse and neglect to Child Safety and sexual offences against children to Police*
- *Working with parents with mental illness: guidelines for mental health clinicians*
- *Discharge escalation pathway for a child at risk*
- *Child Protection Capability Framework*

Queensland Health and DCYJMA have worked together and DCYJMA has built in functionality to its new information management system so that Queensland Health can make reports to child safety through a portal that will use the Child Protection Guide triage function for professionals, to inform decision making. Queensland Health will also be able to make reports via email or telephone should they choose.

Recommendation 3.2 - Queensland Health Child Protection Units have collaborated with DCYJMA on implementing this recommendation.

The first step in implementing Recommendation 3.2 is complete. The Child Safety Officer (Health Liaison) officer role was reviewed in 2021 with changes made to the role. These positions have been upgraded to a higher level.

The next step to complete this recommendation is to revise the *Child Safety Officer – Health Liaison booklet* and relevant supporting guidance in line with recommendations 3.2 i, ii and iii and to incorporate changes made to the role.