

Queensland Family and Child Commission Submission

To: Department of Health (Australia)

Date: 05 May 2017

Topic: My Life, My Lead – Implementation Plan Advisory Group (IPAG) Consultation 2017
<http://www.health.gov.au/internet/main/publishing.nsf/Content/indigenous-ipag-consultation>

Queensland Family and Child Commission

PO Box 15217

Brisbane City East QLD 4002

Web: <http://www.qfcc.qld.gov.au/>

Email: info@QFCC.qld.gov.au

Phone: (07) 3900 6000

Submission contact

Manager Child Death Prevention

Email: child_death_prevention@qfcc.qld.gov.au

The following summarises the key elements from the QFCC's response to the online consultation

Key recommendation

The QFCC recommends that the Pēpi-Pods program, currently being rolled out to Indigenous families in Queensland, be adopted as a national program to reduce the numbers of sudden unexpected infant deaths and close the gap in infant mortality.

Discussion

Analysis of the Queensland Child Death Register indicates that sudden unexpected infant deaths (SUDI) is the leading cause of death for infants aged 1-11 months. Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander infants were found to have SUDI mortality rates four times that for non-Indigenous infants. Further, one in five deaths (22%) of Indigenous infants in the last three years were sudden unexpected deaths.

Risk factors for SUDI include shared sleeping and unsafe sleep surfaces (such as soft surfaces, sofas, folding beds, other temporary bedding), as well as infant factors (prematurity, history of respiratory illness) and parental factors (smoking, high risk lifestyles).

QFCC is recommending that the New Zealand Pēpi-Pods program, currently being rolled out in Queensland Indigenous communities, be considered as part of a national campaign to reduce SUDI deaths. Pēpi-Pods provide a safe sleep space for infants that can be used in co-sleeping situations. A New Zealand study¹ indicates that SUDI mortality rates in New Zealand decreased by 29% since 2009, after a decade long plateau in rates. While the study does not attribute the change directly to the program, it notes that there have been no other significant changes in health services or campaigns, and no changes in immunisation or smoking rates during pregnancy that may explain the decrease.

Professor Jeanine Young, lead Australian researcher, reports that materials with the Pēpi-Pods program have been adapted for Australian indigenous health workers and parents by an Indigenous project worker in collaboration with community and elders.

¹ Mitchell E, Cowan S, Tipene-Leach D (2016). *The recent fall in postperinatal mortality in New Zealand and the Safe Sleep programme*. Acta Pædiatrica ISSN 0803-5253

QFCC contends that efforts to address risk factors for SUDI deaths could make a vital difference in closing the gap in infant mortality. Further, the success of the 'Back to Sleep' campaigns in the 1980s in reducing SUDI rates shows that it is amenable to change.

Further supporting documents

QFCC, 2017, *Key findings: Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander child mortality: 2015—16* Child Death Annual Report Factsheet

<https://www.qfcc.qld.gov.au/sites/default/files/child-deaths-annual-report2015-16/key-findings-Indigenous-factsheet-2015-16.pdf>

Joint statement

<http://statements.qld.gov.au/Statement/2017/3/1/safe-sleeping-program-to-be-rolled-out-to-help-babies-sleep-tight>

Qld Health

<https://www.health.qld.gov.au/news-alerts/news/safe-sleep-for-newborns>

University of Sunshine Coast study

<https://www.usc.edu.au/research-and-innovation/medical-and-health-science/nurture/research-projects/the-pepi-pod-program>