

Annual Report

Deaths of children
and young people
Queensland
2022–23



Queensland
Family & Child
Commission



Queensland
Government

About this report

This report has been prepared under section 29 of the *Family and Child Commission Act 2014* (FCC Act). It describes information on the deaths of children and young people in Queensland registered in the period 1 July 2022 to 30 June 2023. The Queensland Family and Child Commission (QFCC) is a statutory body of the Queensland Government. Its purpose is to influence change that improves the safety and wellbeing of Queensland's children and their families. Under the FCC Act, the QFCC has been charged by government to review and improve the systems that protect and safeguard Queensland's children.

Accessibility



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Contact for enquiries

Queensland Family and Child Commission
Level 8, 63 George Street
PO Box 15217, Brisbane City East QLD 4002

Email: info@qfcc.qld.gov.au
Website: www.qfcc.qld.gov.au

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Queensland
Family & Child
Commission



31 October 2023

The Honourable Yvette D'Ath MP
Attorney-General and Minister for Justice,
Minister for the Prevention of Domestic and Family Violence
1 William Street
BRISBANE QLD 4000

Dear Attorney-General

In accordance with section 29(1) of the *Family and Child Commission Act 2014*, I provide to you the Queensland Family and Child Commission's annual report analysing the deaths of Queensland children and young people.

The report analyses the deaths of all children and young people in Queensland registered in the period 1 July 2022 to 30 June 2023, with a particular focus on external (non-natural) causes.

Yours sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "L. Twyford".

Luke Twyford
Principal Commissioner
Queensland Family and Child Commission

Level 8, 63 George Street
Brisbane Qld 4000
PO Box 15217
Brisbane City East Qld 4002
Telephone 07 3900 6000
Facsimile 07 3900 6050
Website qfcc.qld.gov.au



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Acknowledgements

The Queensland Family and Child Commission (QFCC) acknowledges Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples as the Traditional Custodians across the lands, seas and skies where we walk, live and work.

We recognise Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people as two unique peoples, with their own rich and distinct cultures, strengths and knowledge. We celebrate the diversity of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander cultures across Queensland and pay our respects to Elders past, present and emerging.

The QFCC acknowledges the special rights of children which are recorded in the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child (UNCRC), guided by its four key principles: devotion to the best interests of the child; the right to life, survival and development; respect for the views of the child; and non-discrimination.

The QFCC thanks the government and non-government agencies and individuals who contributed data and their expertise to the report. In particular, we express appreciation to the Registry of Births, Deaths and Marriages; the Coroners Court of Queensland; Queensland Police Service; Queensland Health; Department of Child Safety, Seniors and Disability Services; the Australian Bureau of Statistics (ABS); Queensland Paediatric Quality Council; Queensland Ambulance Service; Queensland Treasury; and the Royal Life Saving Society of Australia. The Victorian Department of Justice and Community Safety is also acknowledged as administrator of the National Coronial Information System.

The QFCC would like to acknowledge the contribution of data from other Australian agencies and committees which perform similar child death review functions. This data has been compiled for an interjurisdictional overview representing further steps towards developing a nationally comparable child death review dataset.

This report may cause distress for some people. If you need help or support, please contact any of these services:

Lifeline

Phone 13 11 14

Beyond Blue

Phone 1300 22 4636

Kids Helpline (for 5–25 year olds)

Phone 1800 55 1800

Principal Commissioner's message

Every child should be loved, safe, and have their rights upheld.

Childhood is a critical time for development and learning, establishing the building blocks of future health and wellbeing. During this time, children are vulnerable, and their right to safety and to live free from harm must be protected. I firmly believe that we all live in communities that want children to be healthy and safe. Unfortunately, this is not always the case. Sadly, in the 12-month period to 30 June 2023, the deaths of 446 children and young people aged 0–17 years were registered in Queensland. I extend my sincerest condolences to the families and friends touched by these deaths.

The death of any child, for any reason, is incredibly tragic and leaves lasting impacts on the community. It often leaves us asking questions—*How and why did this happen? What could we have done differently? What can we do to prevent this from happening again?*

The Queensland Family and Child Commission (QFCC) records information about child deaths in the Queensland Child Death Register (the Register). With 19 years of data, the Register currently contains over 8,500 records, capturing information about a child's demographics, cause and circumstances of death and, where known, certain characteristics or vulnerabilities. It is a critical resource allowing the QFCC to analyse trends and patterns in child mortality, including risk factors for death. We use this information to contribute to research, inform policy improvement and support community safety initiatives aimed at reducing the likelihood of child deaths. This has seen a greater focus on health promotion, environmental change, and legislation and public policies designed to safeguard the lives of infants, children and young people.

In 2022 I was proud to launch *Safer pathways through childhood framework*¹ (Safer Pathways), which provides a five-year forward plan for QFCC's child death prevention activities and research. The framework takes a social justice approach to our work that focuses on achieving health equity. As one of our first pieces of work under Safer Pathways, we released an information paper analysing all drownings and non-fatal immersions occurring in backyard swimming pools since 2011. This analysis used a novel approach by looking at the rate of drowning against the number of residential pools rather than the population – using this lens threw a new light on the regions and councils where residential pools were a risk. Further steps on our pathway to safer childhoods during the next 12 months include projects on:

- paediatric sepsis, in a partnership with Children's Health Queensland
- preventable childhood mortality
- adversity and social vulnerability.

¹ www.qfcc.qld.gov.au/safer-pathways-through-childhood

The QFCC was privileged to host the Australia and New Zealand Child Death Review and Prevention annual conference and meeting in May 2023, bringing together professionals in child death registration, review, research and prevention to share learnings and discuss best-practice in their field.

A key strategy to support child death and injury prevention is to make data held in the Register available for research, public education, policy development and program design. In 2022–23, we provided data and advice to a range of stakeholders on topics such as drowning prevention research, safety standards for infant products, and use of child restraints in vehicles. We also participated in numerous advisory bodies that address matters such as improvements to child mortality data, both within Queensland and nationally; birth and death registration; road safety; sudden unexpected death in infancy; and suicide prevention. We continued to actively share information with the Department of Education to support young people affected by the suicide of a peer and contributed to several initiatives to improve infant sleep environments and reduce the risk of sudden infant death.

I would like to acknowledge the dedication of and thank those who work in roles associated with child death review, research and prevention. These activities contribute to a future in which all of Queensland's children and young people, no matter where they live or who they are, have the same opportunities to lead a full life and to reach their potential.



Luke Twyford

Principal Commissioner

Queensland Family and Child Commission