Over the last three financial years the Queensland Child Death Register recorded the deaths of 155 children known to the child protection system in the 12 month period prior to their death. This included child deaths from natural causes (diseases and morbid conditions) and from external (non-natural) causes.

Over the three years the average annual rate of deaths was 59.3 deaths per 100,000 children known to child protection each year. In comparison, the Queensland average for all children was 37.1 deaths per 100,000 children aged 0–17.

In 2016–17, 57 of the total 421 child deaths were of children known to the child protection system.

Background

The Department of Child Safety, Youth and Women (DCSYW) administers the child protection system in Queensland. A child is deemed to be known to the child protection system if, within one year before the child’s death:

- the child was in the custody or guardianship of the DCSYW, or
- DCSYW was aware of alleged harm or alleged risk of harm, or
- DCSYW took action under the Child Protection Act 1999 in relation to the child, or
- DCSYW was notified of concerns before the child’s birth and reasonably suspected the child might be in need of protection after their birth.

Deaths of children known to the child protection system in the 12 months prior to death are subject to a review of the services provided to the child. Prior to 1 July 2014, a three-year timeframe was used.

Causes of death

The mortality rates for children known to the child protection system have consistently been higher than all children, especially for deaths from external (non-natural) causes.

As indicated in Table 1, children known to the child protection system are over-represented for each of the external causes of death, with mortality rates more than twice the Queensland average rates for all child deaths.

The diseases and morbid conditions mortality rate for children known to the child protection system is below the Queensland average.

Over the past three years, mortality rates for children known to the child protection system have been three or more times higher than the Queensland child mortality rates for:

- Suicide deaths – the suicide mortality rate for children known to the child protection system was more than five times the Queensland average.
- Drowning – the drowning mortality rate for children known to the child protection system was four times the Queensland average.
- Other non-intentional injury – the mortality rate for children known to the child protection system was more than three times the Queensland average.
- Fatal assault and neglect – the mortality rate was more than four times higher for children known to the child protection system.

Sudden unexpected death in infancy (SUDI) is a category of deaths where an infant (aged under one year) dies suddenly with no immediately obvious cause. Predominantly, deaths from SUDI are recorded as cause pending until the outcomes of coroners’ investigations or post-mortem examinations are concluded and cause of death is determined. Children known to the child protection system are over-represented in SUDI deaths. The SUDI mortality rate for this group is more than three times the Queensland average.
Table 1: Child mortality rates by cause of death, three years to June 2017

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Cause of death</th>
<th>Known to child protection in last 12 months</th>
<th>All child deaths</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Rate</td>
<td>Rate</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>All causes</strong></td>
<td>59.3</td>
<td>37.1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Diseases and morbid conditions</strong></td>
<td>26.5</td>
<td>29.1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>External causes</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Transport</td>
<td>4.7</td>
<td>1.7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Drowning</td>
<td>5.5</td>
<td>1.3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Other non-intentional injury</td>
<td>3.6</td>
<td>1.0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Suicide</td>
<td>11.5</td>
<td>2.0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Fatal assault and neglect</td>
<td>4.0</td>
<td>0.9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Sudden unexpected death in infancy (SUDI)</strong></td>
<td>10.7</td>
<td>2.9</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Source: Queensland Child Death Register 2014–17
1. Rates are per 100,000 population aged 0–17 and are averaged over the three-year period 2014–15 to 2016–17.
2. The denominator used for mortality rates for deaths of children known to the child protection system is the number of children known to the DCSYW in the previous financial year.
3. The denominator used for the all child deaths mortality rates is the Estimated Resident Population (ERP) of children aged 0–17 years at June 2015.
4. Sudden unexpected death in infancy (SUDI) is a category of deaths where an infant (<1 year) dies suddenly with no immediately obvious cause. SUDI deaths will also be classified under the official cause of death when it becomes available.

Data for prevention activities

The QFCC collects, analyses and publishes information about child deaths to help prevent future deaths and serious injuries. We work with researchers and other agencies to raise community awareness and develop prevention programs and policies, by identifying risk factors, trends and emerging safety hazards.

The QFCC can provide detailed child death data to researchers and organisations, at no cost – please email child_death_prevention@qfcc.qld.gov.au

Reports on child deaths and 13-year data tables can be found at www.qfcc.qld.gov.au/child-death-reports-and-data-0