

Government Response to the Child Death Review Board 2021-22 Annual Report

Background

The Child Death Review Board (the Board) was established on 1 July 2020 under the *Family and Child Commission Act 2014* (Qld) (FCC Act), as a new independent model for reviewing the deaths of children connected to the child protection system.

Pursuant to section 29A of the FCC Act, the Board's purpose is to identify opportunities for continuous improvement in systems, legislation, policies, and practices as well as to identify preventative mechanisms to help protect children and prevent deaths that may be avoidable.

To achieve its purpose, the Board carries out systems reviews, and in doing so, analyses data, and applies research to identify patterns, trends, and risk factors in relation to the child protection system following the deaths of children connected to the child protection system. In addition, the Board makes recommendations about any legislative change and improvements to systems, policies, and practices which are set out in an Annual Report submitted to the responsible Minister (the Attorney-General and Minister for Justice and Minister for the Prevention of Domestic and Family Violence and Leader of the House). The Annual Report is also a mechanism by which the Board carries out its function of monitoring and reporting on the implementation of its previous recommendations.

2021-2022 Annual Report

This is the Board's second Annual Report and the first report to include monitoring of the implementation of its previous recommendations from its inaugural report.

The Board reviewed 55 cases relating to the death of children and young people who were connected to the child protection system. In reviewing these deaths, the Board noted demographic information and continuing trends, including:

- the overrepresentation of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children in deaths
- that in the majority of cases reviewed, the child was living with family or friends or independently at the time of their death, and
- multiple sudden unexpected deaths in infancy.

The Board has ultimately made **six recommendations** (provided in the table below) aimed at the Queensland Government as a whole that focus on five areas:

1. workforce reform to ensure accessibility and delivery
2. continuity of care for children with complex needs
3. responding to domestic and family violence
4. promoting the safety of infants and unborn children, and
5. promoting the safety of children with a disability.



Government Response

The Queensland Government acknowledges the children and their families and other loved ones and commends the valuable work of the Board and its important role in keeping vulnerable children and young people in Queensland safe. The Queensland Government is committed to improving systems, legislation, policies, and practices with the ultimate goal of protecting children and preventing deaths that may be avoidable.

The Queensland Government has now carefully considered the Board's second Annual Report and its recommendations, acknowledging that it is the collective responsibility of more than one government department to promote the safety, wellbeing and best interests of children and young people.

For transparency and accountability, the Queensland Government has decided to publish a response outlining the actions being taken to implement the Board's recommendations. A response to each of the Board's recommendations is provided in the table below.

Recommendations	Agency (Lead/Supporting)	Government response
<p>1. Workforce reform to ensure service accessibility and delivery</p> <p><i>The Board recommends:</i> that the Queensland Government implements reform across the human services workforce to ensure it can meet the needs of children and families.</p> <p>This reform should:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • examine and address the shortages in core skills areas that are projected to become more pronounced over the coming decade, particularly in regional and remote areas; • recognise the overlap and competition that exists between departmental portfolios, and establish ways (such as exploring joint commissioning and pay parity) to help children, families and carers receive quality support; • promote place-based approaches, particularly in the early intervention and secondary services areas, to address local workforce issues; and • include a focus on foster and kinship carers, with a view to increasing the number and expertise of carers. 	<p>Lead: Department of Youth Justice, Employment, Small Business and Training (DYJESBT) Department of Child Safety, Seniors and Disability Services (DCSSDS)</p> <p>Supporting: Department of Treaty, Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Partnerships, Communities and the Arts (DTATSIPCA) Queensland Health (QH) Department of Education (DoE) Department of Justice and Attorney-General (DJAG)</p>	<p>Supported in principle</p> <p>This recommendation is supported in principle, noting the significant role the non-government sector plays regarding the human services workforce, alongside government.</p> <p>The Queensland Government acknowledges the significant workforce issues impacting the human services sector across the country. <i>Good People. Good Jobs Queensland Workforce Strategy 2022-32</i> (the Strategy) is the first whole-of-government workforce strategy produced by the Queensland Government. The Strategy identifies the workforce pressures faced by Queensland and will be delivered through three, multi-year action plans. The Queensland Workforce Strategy highlights the shared responsibility between all levels of government, employers, industry, individuals, education and training providers and communities.</p> <p>The Department of Child Safety, Seniors and Disability Services (DCSSDS) is currently reviewing workplace and workforce arrangement designs and initiatives through the Workload Redesign Project.</p> <p>DCSSDS has also developed a <i>Strategic Workforce Plan</i>, which includes Regional Workforce Plans to address place-based workforce challenges with actions, performance indicators and targets.</p> <p>The Queensland Government will consider how best to give effect to the intent of recommendation 1 particularly in relation to recognising the overlap and competition that exists between departmental portfolios, and establish ways to help children, families and carers receive quality support. This will be considered in the context of the current industrial relations framework set out in the <i>Industrial Relations Act 2016</i>, which promotes collective bargaining as the primary mechanism for setting wages and conditions; and noting there is already a level of wage parity that exists among a number of Queensland Government agencies.</p> <p>At a national level, the Community Services Ministers are working collaboratively to address the workforce pressures facing child protection and family support systems across the country through the delivery of <i>Safe & Supported: the National Framework for protecting Australia's children 2021-2031(Safe & Supported)</i>, and implementation of the associated Action Plans. The First Action plan includes work to develop a national approach or strategy for a sustainable and skilled children and families services workforce.</p>
<p>2. Workforce reform to ensure service accessibility and delivery</p> <p><i>The Board recommends:</i> that the Queensland Government implements reform across regional and remote communities of Queensland, particularly First Nations communities, to ensure there is a present human services workforce that can engage with the local community, particularly in culturally safe and engaging ways.</p> <p>This is to include:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • investigating how statutory roles can be redirected to local Community-Controlled Organisations to enable local employment and service delivery; 	<p>Lead: DYJESBT, DCSSDS, DTATSIPCA</p> <p>Supporting: QH DoE DJAG</p>	<p>Supported</p> <p>This recommendation is supported.</p> <p>The Queensland Government recognises the importance of local community and culturally safe responses in building a strong human services workforce to ensure service accessibility and delivery. For Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities, this requires working in partnership with First Nations peoples and organisations to design and deliver services that meet identified needs and priorities.</p> <p>Key initiatives currently supporting the intent of this recommendation include:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Local Decision Making Bodies (LDMBs) are being established by DTATSIPCA as part of the Local Thriving Communities reform with the aim of empowering First Nations communities to influence and co-design how services are delivered to communities. Engagement with LDMBs across Queensland will inform development of regional and remote workforce strategies. • As a key action under the <i>Queensland Government's Workforce Strategy 2022-32</i> (noted above), the Queensland Government is implementing <i>Paving the Way - First Nations Training Strategy</i> and is supporting the development of Queensland's Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander workforce and improving job outcomes through training and skills development.

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<ul style="list-style-type: none"> empowering Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples through diverting funding to Community-Controlled Organisations for para-professional and innovative service delivery solutions that address persistent gaps in government workforces; and investigating and repurposing unspent funding for long-term vacant positions to support place-based service design and delivery in regional and remote communities to address the departmental and portfolio silos that are impacting on the ability to deliver holistic family support and early intervention. 		<p>DCSSDS is implementing <i>Our Way: a generational strategy for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children and families 2017-37</i>. Principle 2 of <i>Our Way</i> is 'ensuring that Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples and organisations participate in and have control over decisions that affect their children', and includes building the capacity of community-controlled organisations; facilitating the participation of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander families and children in decisions; delegating one or more statutory child protection functions or decisions in relation to an Aboriginal or Torres Strait Islander child to the Chief Executive Officer of an Aboriginal or Torres Strait Islander entity when certain requirements are met; and recognising the role of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities to drive local solutions to local issues.</p> <p>The Queensland Government has committed to ensuring that Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children, young people or families can access their supports through an Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander community-controlled organisation (ATSICCO) if they wish to do so. There is a 10 year timeframe for transitioning investment to that sector to enable this to occur. The department will work closely with the Queensland Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Child Protection Peak (QATSICPP), regions, Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Community Controlled Organisations (ATSICCOs) and mainstream providers to plan and execute the transition of investment. This includes collaboration with QATSICPP to develop a workforce strategy for the ATSICCO sector.</p> <p>The Queensland Government is also developing a new, whole-of-government First Nations Economic Strategy, planned to be released in 2023-24, to support economic participation and self-empowerment for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Queenslanders. The strategy will link with workforce, skills and training strategies and identify emerging opportunities, working in co-design with a First Nations Economic Committee, to support workforce development across the state, including at a regional and community level.</p>
<p>3.Continuity of care for children with complex needs</p> <p><i>The Board recommends:</i> that the Queensland Government develops a fit-for-purpose model that provides a continuum of care for children with high-risk behaviours that recognises that multiple government departments come into contact with these young people, and there is no single responsible owner for the assessment and response required to address the complex needs. The model should:</p> <p>3.1 Be informed by a study of child death, serious injury or other relevant cases where the children were identified to have complex needs manifesting in high-risk behaviours to establish:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> commonalities with their trajectory into tertiary systems; and touchpoints with universal, secondary and tertiary systems that provide greatest opportunity for an entry point into the model. <p>3.2 Include an early intervention stream that provides a pathway for</p>	<p>Lead: DCSSDS</p> <p>Supporting:</p> <p>QH</p> <p>DoE</p> <p>DYJESBT</p>	<p>For further consideration</p> <p>The Queensland Government recognises that children with high-risk behaviours require specialised support, together with the importance of early interventions to support the social, emotional, health and wellbeing needs of children, young people and their families before their behaviours escalate or reach a crisis point.</p> <p>The Queensland Government provides a range of supports for children with complex needs who are engaging in high-risk behaviours through the health, education, child protection, and youth justice systems. A number of initiatives are currently underway to improve the responses to children and young people with complex needs, including from a continuum of care perspective, but we recognise that more can be done.</p> <p>The Queensland Government has a strong interest in working with the Queensland Family and Child Commission and Child Death Review Board to further explore this recommendation over the next 12 months, with a particular focus on:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> better understanding the trajectories of children and young people; providing for more coordinated and integrated responses; and considering which targeted early interventions could best support children, young people and their families. <p>In this context, and given the expansive scope of this recommendation, it has been designated as 'for further consideration.'</p>

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<p>professionals working closely with children and families, such as schools, to trigger a case management response. The response should focus on:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • addressing the social, emotional, cultural and health and wellbeing needs of children and their families which contribute to their behaviours; • supporting the child's family and carers for the continuation of positive family functioning, behavioural guidance and treatment at home; • coordinating health-based assessments and treatments; • working with the child's school to ensure the child is engaged in education; and • providing access to informal and formal respite for children and families. <p>3.3 Include a tertiary stream that provides a specialised accommodation service for children that meets the underlying causes of high-risk behaviours that are a danger to themselves or others that is:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • underpinned by a culturally appropriate case management response addressing the social, emotional, health and wellbeing issues of children and their families contributing to the behaviours; • authorised by a clear and appropriate legal framework that clarifies if, when and how restrictive practices can be used, and how the system will be monitored with effective oversight to ensure decisions and actions are in the best interests of the young person; and • integrates ongoing access for the child to family, culture and education. 		

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<p>4.Responding to domestic and family violence</p> <p>The Board recognises there is significant reform occurring in the area of domestic and family violence.</p> <p><i>The Board recommends:</i> that within this reform, the Queensland Government include a focus on:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • children as specific victims of domestic and family violence in their own right; • culturally appropriate responses or services for children displaying problematic or violent and aggressive behaviours in the context of their own experiences of domestic and family violence; and • the role of fathers and fathering, as promising points for behaviour change intervention. 	<p>Lead: DJAG</p> <p>Supporting:</p> <p>QPS</p> <p>DCSSDS</p> <p>DYJESBT</p> <p>DTATSIPCA</p> <p>QH</p> <p>DoE</p> <p>Department of Housing</p>	<p>Supported</p> <p>The Queensland Government is undertaking significant reforms to respond to domestic and family violence.</p> <p>This includes strengthening the Domestic and Family Violence Common Risk and Safety Framework (CRASF), which is a whole-of-system framework to guide the delivery of integrated service responses to domestic and family violence victim-survivors. The CRASF enables service providers and Queensland Government to enhance the safety of victim-survivors, including children and to hold perpetrators to account. The CRASF incorporates culturally sensitive and demographic factors to recognise particular risks that may be unique to priority population groups.</p> <p>The CRASF recognises children as victims of domestic and family violence in their own right with unique tools provided to screen for domestic and family violence in children (separate from the adult screening tools).</p> <p>The Queensland Government also continues to explore culturally appropriate responses for children displaying problematic or violent and aggressive behaviours in the context of their own experiences of domestic and family violence. This includes whole-of-community place-based prevention projects across three locations to address youth sexual violence and abuse, including an Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander-specific trial in Yarrabah. The Queensland Government will also continue to support the community co-design process currently underway in Aurukun to develop long-term, sustainable strategies for preventing and addressing youth sexual violence and abuse.</p> <p>Additionally, the Queensland Government has committed almost \$3 million per annum in extra funding to existing men's behaviour change programs, including two trial youth behaviour change programs addressing intimate partner violence and adolescent-to-parent violence respectively. This brings the ongoing investment in men's behavioural change programs to more than \$12 million per year.</p> <p>The Queensland Government will consider engagement with fathers and fatherhood as an opportunity for intervention as part of the development of a system-wide domestic and family violence perpetrator strategy.</p>
<p>5.Promoting the safety of infants and unborn children</p> <p><i>The Board recommends:</i> that the Queensland Government:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • extends health home visiting programs across the state as a priority to focus on parents with complex needs, with a view to: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ supporting and monitoring the wellbeing and development of an infant within the family home; and ○ addressing families' health and psychosocial needs and wellbeing as they arise. • implements or expands initiatives to create safer sleep environments for all priority Queensland populations by: 	<p>Lead agency: QH</p> <p>Support agency: DCSSDS</p>	<p>Supported in principle</p> <p>The Queensland Government supports this recommendation in-principle and is considering initiatives to promote the safety and wellbeing of infants and unborn children under the First 2000 Days Queensland Health response.</p> <p>There are two Hospital Health Services (HHS's) that have been funded to execute a home visiting program – Children's Health Queensland HHS and Gold Coast HHS. These have been evaluated and demonstrate increased parental capacity to support their child's early development.</p> <p>Two initiatives (Connecting2U and Pepi-pod) have been trialled to promote safe sleeping environments which focus on health promotion intervention and safe sleeping space and education for families. The trials have been evaluated and further rollout is being considered.</p> <p>For Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people and communities, working in partnership with trusted local organisations and people will achieve more positive results in accessing First Nations people with complex needs.</p>

Recommendations	Agency (Lead/Supporting)	Government response
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ supplementing home visiting with tiered support strategies using the family’s existing resources; ○ upscaling multimodal safe sleeping programs to provide an acceptable, feasible, safe, and culturally appropriate initiative for families; and ○ implementing evidence-based and practical messaging around safe sleep practices and finding ways to achieve consistency of messaging across decentralised service systems. 		
<p>6.Promoting the safety of children with disability</p> <p><i>The Board recommends:</i> that the Queensland Government engages with the Commonwealth Government to improve access for vulnerable children and families to the National Disability Insurance Scheme (NDIS) by:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • demonstrating the cost benefit of establishing state-based positions across Queensland to help vulnerable children and parents with disability access the NDIS system and receive services – these positions need to be based in universal or secondary services with which children and parents engage; and • improving the mechanisms by which children and parents with complex needs can enter and access the NDIS – including consideration of an appropriate agreement that allows prescribed state professionals to refer children and parents to the NDIS on their behalf. <p><i>The Board expects the outcomes of the engagement to be reported back to it by August 2023.</i></p>	<p>Lead agency: DCSSDS, QH and DoE</p>	<p>Supported in principle</p> <p>This recommendation is supported in principle, noting that:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • supporting access to the NDIS is primarily the responsibility of the Commonwealth Government; • implementation of the recommendation is reliant on working with the Commonwealth Government on access to a national program; • there is a strong likelihood of significant recommendations of relevance arising from the Independent Review of the NDIS, which is due to report in October 2023 and that therefore a report back to the Board by August 2023 will not be able to be achieved; and • the Queensland Government has already committed funding to the Assessment and Referral Team (ART) Program, which continues to support at risk children and young people to access the NDIS, as well as building the capability of Queensland Government agencies to more effectively navigate the NDIS access pathway. <p>The Queensland Government continues to work with the Commonwealth Government and other NDIS governing partners to improve NDIS access and to advocate for simpler and more effective access processes that ensure vulnerable and complex cohorts can access the NDIS and receive the supports they need. The Independent Review of the NDIS is currently underway, which is exploring the design, operations, and sustainability of the NDIS and ways to build a more responsive, supportive, and sustainable market.</p> <p>DCSSDS has a role in supporting Queensland Government engagement with the Commonwealth Government through the Disability Reform Ministerial Council and the NDIS Executive Steering Committee to improve access for vulnerable children and families to the NDIS. This advocacy will continue and is a key priority for Queensland, including during the NDIS Review.</p> <p>As part of the 2023-24 Queensland Budget, government invested a total of \$16.2 million over four years and \$2 million per annum ongoing to:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • support at-risk-children and young people to access the NDIS until December 2024; and • establish and maintain a specialist disability assessment team to support people with complex needs navigating multiple mainstream services systems to access NDIS services from January 2025.