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Embargoed until 3:30pm Wednesday 26 October 2011

Child Death Review Team Annual Report 2010

The NSW Child Death Review Team's Annual Report 2010 was released today by the Team's Convenor, NSW Ombudsman, Mr Bruce Barbour.

The report examines the deaths of 589 children registered in 2010.

This report is the fifteenth annual report produced by the Team, and the first since responsibility for providing assistance to the Team was transferred from the Commission for Children and Young People to the Ombudsman's office.

Mr Barbour said: **'While the number and rate of child deaths registered in NSW shows a small increase in comparison to 2009, the overall mortality rate for children in this state has fallen by more than 30 per cent over the 15 years since the Team was established.'**

'The death of every child is a profound loss, and the Team's role is to learn from those deaths to inform strategies that could prevent other children dying in similar circumstances. Reviews of children whose deaths were registered in 2010 identified a number of areas where there is clearly scope for more, and possibly better targeted, prevention efforts.'

Some of the findings detailed in the report include:

- Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children continue to be over-represented in child deaths, with the mortality rate for these children being over twice that of non-Indigenous children
- Fifty infants died suddenly and unexpectedly. At least one modifiable risk factor was present in the large majority of these cases, including the infant being placed in a prone position for sleep
- Twenty-seven children and young people died in a motor vehicle crash. Speed was identified as a contributing factor in almost half of these crashes, as was other dangerous or reckless driving. Five children who died were not appropriately restrained in the vehicle that crashed
- 14 children drowned, six of those children drowned in private swimming pools. In all six cases, pool gates or barriers were faulty and children were not being closely supervised

'The Team's immediate priority will be to develop an effective research agenda to progress prevention efforts. In addition to its ongoing focus on injury-related deaths, the Team will give particular consideration to preventable infant deaths, and looking at how factors, such as socioeconomic status and child protection history, might influence rates of child deaths.'

On behalf of the Team, Mr Barbour extended condolences to the families and friends of the children and young people who died.

A snapshot of the NSW Child Death Review Team Annual Report 2010

The NSW Child Death Review Team's Annual Report 2010 provides information on 589 children and young people ('children') whose deaths were registered in NSW in 2010.

Deaths from all causes (page 15)

Cause of death was known for 542 of the children. Of these children, 445 (82%) died as a result of natural causes, and 97 deaths (18%) were injury related; 70 were unintentional injury and 27 were intentional (13 fatal assaults and 14 suicides).

The two leading causes of death were conditions arising during pregnancy or soon after birth (page 36), and congenital malformations or chromosomal abnormalities (page 41).

Injury-related deaths were the third most common cause of death for all children (page 73), and the leading cause of death for children aged between one and four years and 15 – 17 years (page 24).

Age and Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander status (page 16)

Most of the children who died were very young: almost three-quarters of all the children who died were under five years of age. Over 60 per cent were infants aged less than one year.

Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children continue to be over-represented in child deaths. These children accounted for 10 per cent (59) of all child deaths registered in 2010.

Deaths of infants and Sudden Unexpected Death in Infancy (page 63)

Fifty infant deaths (14%) were Sudden Unexpected Death in Infancy (SUDI).

At least one modifiable risk factor for SUDI was present in almost all (94%) cases, including inappropriate bedding, prone or side sleep position, and exposure to tobacco smoke.

Transport deaths (page 74)

Thirty-five children died in transport incidents. Over half were aged between 15 and 17 years. Transport fatalities remain the leading external cause of death for children in NSW.

The majority (27) died in motor vehicle crashes (19 as passengers and eight as drivers). A range of largely preventable factors contributed to the crashes, including dangerous or reckless driving, speed, inappropriate, child restraints, and driver drug and /or alcohol use.

Deaths from drowning (page 81)

The drowning deaths of 14 children were registered. Drowning was the equal second most frequent external cause of death for children.

Six children drowned in private swimming pools. In all cases, pool gates and/or fencing were faulty, and the children were not, or not actively, supervised by an adult.

Eight children drowned a natural body of water, a dam or a bathtub. In five cases, the children were very young and either entered the water unobserved by their carers, or were momentarily unsupervised in the water.

Other unintentional injury related deaths (page 88)

Fifteen children died as a result of other unintentional injury related deaths. Four children died in house fires, four children died from unintentional poisoning, three children died from injuries acquired during sporting activities, two children died following medical procedures, one child died from a fall, and one child died from crush injury.

Suicide (page 93)

The deaths of 14 young people aged from 14 to 17 years were the result of suicide.

Identified risk factors included mental health problems, with depression being the most common; previous suicide attempts, expressed suicidal ideation or previous self harm; evidence of substance misuse; and social isolation and exclusion.

Fatal assault (page 101)

The deaths of 13 children and young people registered in NSW in 2010 were the result of fatal assault. All fatal assault deaths of children and young people are separately reviewable by the NSW Ombudsman.

Fatal assaults occurred most commonly among young people aged 15 to 17 years (eight children) and among young children, aged less than five years (three children).

Generally, most fatal assaults of children are familial homicides. For fatal assaults registered in 2010, however, the majority (seven of the 13) were teenagers allegedly killed by peers.

A snapshot of trends over 15 years

Over the 15 years from 1996, the mortality rate for all children has fallen by about 36 per cent.

The decline of injury related deaths over the years has, since 2008, resulted in external cause deaths falling from the second most common cause of death to the third.

There has been a decline in SUDI over the past 14 years, however, there has been no significant change in the rate of SUDI since 2004.

Since 1996, there has been a continued overall decrease in drowning deaths of children.

Overall, there has been a decline in the rate of transport deaths since 1996. This has been predominantly in relation to pedestrian deaths.

An interval analysis of the 15 year period from 1996 shows a significant decline in the rate of deaths due to suicide. Males were about twice as likely to commit suicide as females.

Annual rates of fatal assault have fluctuated considerably since 1996. The increase in deaths for the 2010 year is exclusively in relation to the deaths of teenagers in peer-related incidents, which were unusually high.