



Secretary

Department of Health and Human Services

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Kate Sanderson
Coroner's Registrar
Coroners Court of Victoria
65 Kavanagh Street
SOUTHBANK VIC 3006

Dear Ms Sanderson

Thank you for your letter of 1 November 2019 addressed to the Honourable Daniel Andrews MP in relation to the investigation and finding without inquest into the death of Ms Sanaya Sahib. As the Department of Health and Human Services (the department) has responsibility for the state-wide Maternal and Child Health (MCH) program, your letter has come to me for reply.

The department acknowledges the tragic death of Ms Sanaya Sahib and provides the following advice in relation to recommendations regarding delivery of MCH services.

Recommendation one

I refer to Acting State Coroner English's recommendation, pursuant to section 72(2) of the *Coroners Act 2008* that:

"the Victorian Department of Health and Human Services update the frequency of the maternal health and wellbeing check, as outlined by the Maternal Child Health Service: Practice guidelines 2009 and Perinatal Mental Health and Psychosocial Assessment: Practice Resource Manual for Victorian maternal and Child Health Nurses, to occur at regular intervals throughout a mothers' engagement with Maternal and Child Health Service at least once a year for the first two years of the birth of a child".

MCH services provide a comprehensive approach to the promotion, prevention and early identification of the physical, emotional and social factors for all families from birth to school age.

With nine MCH Key Ages and Stages (KAS) visits scheduled within the first two years, MCH nurses have multiple opportunities to monitor and respond to the changing needs of women and their families. While maternal post-natal mental health screening is routinely provided at the four-week visit, flexibility in universal MCH service ensures that nurses can provide additional support including screening for emerging mental health needs at any visit.

The department is currently exploring options for the implementation of an additional universal mental health screen by MCH nurses. In addition, the Royal Commission into Victoria's Mental Health System will examine how to improve the identification and response to parental mental illness through pregnancy and in the early years.

Recommendation two

I also refer to Acting State Coroner English's second recommendation that:

"the Victorian Department of Health and Human Services issues updated guidelines to include steps to contact mothers in instances where their personal circumstances have significantly changed to administer post-natal depression screening at the earliest available opportunity".

Each local government maintains a comprehensive procedure to follow up with parents and families where engagement with MCH services is poor or changes over time. The *MCH Program Standards 2019* emphasise the importance of monitoring engagement and family wellbeing as a critical component of practice.

Additional information

In response to the broader findings of Acting State Coroner English, the department recognises that the MCH Service has a fundamental role to play in identifying, responding to and preventing family violence. The MCH Service is uniquely placed to build parental capacity, foster respectful relationships, undertake population screening to identify family violence risk, and link families into more specialist services. In addition to implementing whole of government reforms including Family Violence and Child Information Sharing and the Multi-Agency Risk Assessment and Management Framework in the MCH Service, the following family violence initiatives commenced in 2017-18:

- an additional family violence consultation for families at risk of, or experiencing family violence, providing capacity for nurses to identify and assess family violence and to undertake appropriate risk management and support activities
- annual family violence professional development for MCH nurses to build their capacity to identify and respond to family violence
- comprehensive training in trauma informed practice, tailored to the MCH Service.

Recent new investment has significantly expanded supports for new parents, particularly those experiencing, or at risk of experiencing mental health issues including:

- expansion of the Enhanced MCH services, providing additional services to 15 per cent of families with children aged from birth to three years from July 2020
- additional sleep and settling support for new families including self-care resources, parent information sessions, outreach consultations and more support through the MCH Line
- expansion of the Early Parenting Centre network from three to ten centres, providing regional and rural communities access to specialist early parenting services currently only available in metropolitan areas. These services include provision of support to resolve parenting distress and disruption and build capability for sustainable and effective parenting.

If you require further information please contact Therese Robinson, Acting Assistant Director, Maternal and Child Health and Parenting Unit, Maternal, Child and Family Health Branch on 03 9096 9345 or at therese.robinson@dhhs.vic.gov.au.

Yours sincerely


Kym Peake
Secretary

20 / 1 / 2020

