



Department of Families, Fairness and Housing

50 Lonsdale Street
Melbourne Victoria 3000
Telephone: 1300 475 170
GPO Box 1774
Melbourne Victoria 3001
www.dffh.vic.gov.au
DX 210319
BAC-CO-17815

Mr Will Doolan
Coroner's Registrar
Coroners Court of Victoria
65 Kavanagh Street
SOUTHBANK VIC 3006
By email: cpuresponses@coronerscourt.vic.gov.au

Dear Mr Doolan

Investigation into the death of [REDACTED] – COR 2016 6080

Thank you for your letter of 5 August 2021, enclosing Deputy State Coroner English's finding into the death of [REDACTED] and recommendations made to the Department of Families Fairness and Housing (the department), the Department of Health (DH) and Royal Children's Hospital (RCH).

Deputy State Coroner English has made three recommendations, two of which require a direct response from the department. Recommendation one is directed only to the RCH, however the recommendation has implications for child protection. Recommendation two is directed to the department, DH, and RCH, with recommendation three directed to the department and RCH.

I provide the following responses to each recommendation on behalf of the department and in consultation with the Department of Health.

Recommendation one

To the Royal Children's Hospital: Where the Royal Children's Hospital provides advice as to the healthcare needs of a child subject to Children's Court orders, that advice should be communicated in writing to the Department of Families, Fairness and Housing and recorded in the Department of Families, Fairness and Housing's CRIS system and provided in writing to those people providing for the immediate care and welfare of the child, as well as to the Children's court, the parties and their legal representatives, including where relevant, the Court appointed independent children's lawyer.

The department supports the recommendation and agrees to work closely with the RCH to establish clear processes regarding the sharing of advice. The department is committed to ensuring the appropriate recording of advice as to the healthcare needs of children from the RCH and to the sharing of that information to anyone that requires the information for the purpose of making decisions or caring for the child.

Recommendation two

To the Royal Children’s Hospital, the Department of Families, Fairness and Housing and the Department of Health: That the Royal Children’s Hospital, Department of Families, Fairness and Housing, and the Department of Health consider, develop and expand models for the embedding of healthcare knowledge within Child Protection, including a wider roll out of the Vulnerable Children’s Health Project.

The department agrees that health services and child protection practitioners must work together to effectively support the health needs of children. In recognition of the distinct roles and responsibilities that each party plays in decision making regarding healthcare of children, there are several strategies and projects in place to support child protection knowledge of the health system as well as supporting health service understanding of child protection systems and processes. These strategies were developed prior to February 2021, when the department and DH were one department (The Department of Health and Human Services).

- Vulnerable Children’s Health project (West Melbourne and Brimbank Melton) and HealthWatch (Hume Moreland and North East Melbourne) both embed nurses as specialised practitioners into local child protection offices in Footscray and Preston. The nurses are employed through local health services and support early consultation and health system navigation for child protection practitioners at all phases of child protection involvement. Both services have received pilot funding until 30 June 2022 and will require further investment to enable any wider rollout.
- The DH’s *Healthcare that counts: a framework for improving care for vulnerable children in Victorian health services 2017* is a quality improvement framework that provides guidance for practice and organisational improvement that supports outcomes that strengthen the collaboration between child protection and Victorian health services.
- Pathway to Good Health (PTGH) Clinics provided specialised assessment and health management plans for children who enter the care system for the first time. Five PTGH sites operating one outpatient session per week are located in Victoria including one at the RCH. These clinics support access to care for children through comprehensive multidisciplinary health assessment and health planning that contribute to strengthening child protection practitioners understanding and management of health needs in the care environment.
- The department supports child protection practitioners’ understanding of the health system, and requirements of working with children with complex medical needs, by publishing and updating practice advice in the Child Protection Manual.

The practice advice stipulates that professional consultation and collaboration should occur within a continuum of services involved with the child. It also provides guidance to child protection practitioners that when speaking with medical professionals and disability support services, they ask questions to clarify the nature and extent of the child’s disability or complex medical needs, the formal diagnosis or prognosis, all medications, and the existing treatment plan. This information is recorded on Client Relationship Information System (CRIS).

Both the department and the DH continue to work together to explore opportunities that develop and strengthen the delivery of healthcare for children in the child protection system that enable high quality and coordinated care.

Recommendation three

To the Royal Children’s Hospital and the Department of Families, Fairness and Housing: To review the current memorandum of understanding in place between the two organisations in light of this finding to strengthen relationships and clarify ambiguities, particularly to ensure it reflects the importance in discharge planning to delineate each of the roles and responsibilities of care between DFFH and RCH where a third-party agency is involved in care provision. This should be sufficient to clarify, if a similar situation were to arise in the future, for example, whose responsibility it is to ensure adequate training for staff caring for a patient with a tracheostomy at home, and whose responsibility it is to ascertain the capacity of attending staff to assess and manage an evolving tracheostomy emergency in the setting of a home environment.

The department is committed to engaging with the RCH to review the relevant provisions in the current memorandum of understanding (MOU) between Child Protection and the RCH to strengthen relationships and clarify any ambiguity. As part of this review, and in consultation with RCH, a state-wide MOU template (the template) is now being developed by the DH that will inform the next iteration of the MOU between Child Protection and the RCH.

The template builds on the existing MOU between the department and RCH and recognises that a number of hospitals around the state can benefit from a document that clearly articulates their roles and responsibilities in the delivery of health care for children in the child protection system. The template addresses key areas of responsibilities for parties including:

- multi-disciplinary case conferencing and discharge planning meetings
- expectations around collaboration, including collaborative decision making
- communication protocols and respectful working relationships, including clear communication into any health and safety plans made for children
- clear processes for sharing information

As a result of the Coroner’s recommendation additional wording has been added to the template to include the responsibility for third party training for management of complex medical needs in the home environment. Finalisation of the template is underway but due to the significant pressure on both the health and child protection system in managing the COVID-19 pandemic a final draft may not be available until late 2021 or early 2022.

Should you wish to discuss this matter further, please contact Shane D Wilson, Director Child Protection and Care at Shane.D.Wilson@dffh.vic.gov.au.

Yours sincerely



Argiri Alisandratos
Deputy Secretary
Children Families Communities and Disability

28/ 10/ 2021

Cc: Chris Asquini, Deputy Secretary Community Services Operations Division,
chris.asquini@dffh.vic.gov.au