



Department of Health

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BAC-DM-4553
Court Reference: COR 2016 6080

Will Doolan
Coroner's Registrar
Coroner's Court of Victoria

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Thank you for your email of 5 August 2021 to the Department of Families, Fairness and Housing (DFFH) in relation to the investigation and finding with inquest into the death of [REDACTED] with recommendations for the Royal Children's Hospital (RCH), the Department of Health (the department) and DFFH.

As the department manages the Vulnerable Children's Health Project, findings of the inquest have been forwarded to me for reply regarding recommendation two. In providing this response the department acknowledges the tragic death of [REDACTED], and I extend my sympathies to [REDACTED] family and those that cared for [REDACTED].

The capacity of healthcare and child protection practitioners to work effectively together makes a real difference to the health, wellbeing and safety for vulnerable children and young people. In recommendation two Deputy State Coroner English directs 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 supports the recommendation to expand models for embedding healthcare knowledge within Child Protection, noting this can occur in several ways. The Vulnerable Children's Health project operates across the Western Melbourne and Hume-Brimbank areas. The project embeds specialist community health nurses with child protection practitioners within local offices to provide early consultation and advice, and to support health system navigation. Improving early access to local community-based health and wellbeing services for vulnerable children is a priority.

With investment in 2021/22 of \$41.3m (over four years), planning is underway for the establishment of three community based infant child and family health and wellbeing hubs recommended by the Royal Commission into Victoria's Mental Health System. Like the Vulnerable Children's Project, it is expected hubs will improve access to early consultation, navigation and access to local health and wellbeing services including for vulnerable children engaged in the child protection system. The hubs also provide an opportunity to enhance the knowledge of healthcare, both mental and physical health, across the social service system. As the service model is developed for the hubs, the specific mechanisms to achieve better coordination between health and social services will be identified and implemented. The finding with inquest into the death of [REDACTED] will inform this work.

Alongside improving access to community based health and wellbeing services for children and families, the following departmental initiatives have been developed to support safe and high quality healthcare for vulnerable children.

Published in 2017, *Healthcare that counts: a framework for improving care for vulnerable children in Victorian health services* provides guidance for practice and organisational improvement focused on vulnerable children and their families. The framework provides practical advice and strategies to guide partnership, share knowledge and improve practice between child protection and health services. Implementation of the framework has been supported by:

- regional-based forums and local information sharing practices
- publication of training materials and facts sheets on the Royal Children's Hospital website.

Established in 2012 the Vulnerable Children Learning Portal also provides online learning modules for health professionals to improve their knowledge, understanding and support of vulnerable children and families. In 2019-20, over 50,000 health workers having accessed training available on the portal.

Development of a memorandum of understanding (MoU) template is underway to support health services and local child protection offices to articulate roles and responsibilities in the delivery of healthcare for children in the child protection system. This template builds on the existing MoU between DFFH and RCH and addresses key areas of responsibilities for parties such as multi-disciplinary case conferencing, discharge planning and collaborative decision making. Finalisation of the template MoU will consider opportunities to strengthen management of complex medical needs in the home environment. When completed, the template MoU will be available to health services and child protection offices across Victoria and will strengthen local-level collaboration.

The department will continue working with DFFH to explore opportunities that develop and strengthen the delivery of healthcare to vulnerable children, including those in the child protection system. I understand that Agiri Alisandratos, Deputy Secretary of the Children Families Communities and Disability has responded on behalf of DFFH.

Should you wish to discuss this matter further, please contact Alison Boylan, Director in the State-wide Policy and Programs Branch at the Department of Health at alison.boylan@health.vic.gov.au.

Yours sincerely

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to be 'Jodie Geissler', with a long horizontal stroke extending to the right.

Jodie Geissler
Deputy Secretary
Commissioning and System Improvement

08 / 11 / 2021