



Department of Families, Fairness and Housing

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Janet Lee
Coroner's Registrar
Coroners Court of Victoria
By email: cpresponses@coronerscourt.vic.gov.au

Dear Ms Lee

Investigation into the passing of Sasha - COR 2019 4069

I write in response to your letter dated 17 July 2023, which enclosed a copy of Coroner Lawrie's findings into the passing of Sasha, and recommendations made to the Department of Families, Fairness and Housing (the Department) and Central Gippsland Health Service.

Coroner Lawrie made three recommendations that require a direct response from the Department.

I provide the following responses to each recommendation on behalf of the Department.

Recommendation one

That the Department of Families, Fairness and Housing review its Child Protection Manual and other relevant policies or guidelines to include guidance to Child Protection practitioners to seek, where possible, familial medical history that may impact the health of a child in its care.

The Department supports this recommendation in-principle. There is currently no policy or practice requirement for Child Protection to obtain the medical histories of the birth parents for children in care. Where information about a birth parent's medical history is required to assess risk and ensure the safety of the child it may be necessary to obtain this information.

The Department will consider this recommendation with a view to explore any potential policy and legal complexities associated with the introduction of such policy and guidelines to ensure there are no unintended consequences.

Matters for consideration and consultation with relevant stakeholders include, but are not limited to:

- the appropriateness of child protection practitioners to seek, obtain or understand familial medical history without formal medical training;
- the extent to which obligations should be imposed on child protection practitioners to seek, obtain or understand familial medical history without formal medical training whilst not impeding on their exercise of professional judgment;
- the level of detail child protection practitioners are expected to seek of parents' medical histories;

- the circumstances in which parental medical history is sought, including when birth parents are not willing to disclose this information;
- how child protection practitioners use this medical information and for what purpose;
- how the parental medical history will be stored and who will have access to this information;
- health privacy laws and the disclosure of such medical information.

The expected timeframe to consider this recommendation, and to implement any identified policy changes, is June 2024.

Recommendation two

That the Department of Families, Fairness and Housing implement a means of effective urgent communication with its case-contracting agencies, supported by appropriate policy and procedures, in respect of a child in care. The means adopted should be available at all hours and capable of actively alerting the recipient.

The Department supports this recommendation in-principle. The Department agrees there should be a means of effective urgent communication between case contracting agencies in respect of a child in care. The Department will consider this recommendation and will review its current procedures and requirements for case-contracting agencies to notify child protection of major incidents, including after hours, and will strengthen and clarify current processes, where appropriate.

The expected timeframe to consider this recommendation, and to implement any identified policy changes, is June 2024.

Recommendation three

That the Department of Families, Fairness and Housing review its Child Protection Manual and other relevant policies or guidelines to make clear to case-contracting agencies, the circumstances in which it expects to urgently receive information concerning a child in care.

The Department supports this recommendation in-principle. The Department is committed to ensuring the Child Protection Manual has clear guidelines outlining the expectations of case contracting agencies.

The Department will consider this recommendation and review current policies for when case contracting agencies are to urgently inform Child Protection. The Department will consider outlining circumstances for when case contracting agencies are required to urgently notify Child Protection, without restricting these situations and removing the element of professional judgement.

The expected timeframe to consider this recommendation, and to implement any policy changes if deemed appropriate, is June 2024.

Should you have any queries, please contact Simone Corin, Executive Director, Children and Families at the department on [REDACTED]

Yours sincerely



Peta McCammon

Secretary

17/10/2023