



Secretary

Department of Health

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His Honour Judge John Cain
State Coroner
Coroners Court of Victoria
65 Kavanagh Street
SOUTHBANK VIC 3006

team3@courts.vic.gov.au

Dear Judge Cain

REF: COR 2016 2733 - Investigation into the death of [REDACTED]

Thank you for your letter on 20 May 2021 regarding the finding without inquest into the death of [REDACTED].

The Department of Health (the department) acknowledges the tragic death of [REDACTED] and has consulted across portfolio areas and with Safer Care Victoria to prepare the following responses to the recommendations made under section 72(2) of the *Coroners Act 2008* regarding guidance to the Maternal and Child Health (MCH) service.

RECOMMENDATION ONE

*“That the **Department of Health** update the Maternal and Child Health Service Guidelines and Additional Family Violence Consultation- Practice Note for Maternal and Child Health Nurses to indicate that family violence enquiries must be asked whilst the mother is alone as a matter of standard procedure and what strategies are best adopted to achieve this. Appropriate training must also be provided to staff performing these tasks”.*

RECOMMENDATION TWO

*“The **Department of Health** also review the Maternal and Child Health Services Practice Guidelines 2009 and the Additional Family Violence Consultation- Practice Note for Maternal and Child Health Nurses with a view to updating these guidelines to provide staff with guidance on how to arrange a family violence consultation with a mother, to manage instances in which the partner declines to leave the mother alone and how to manage suspected perpetrators of violence”.*

Recommendation one and two will be implemented.

The department will work with Safer Care Victoria to develop and disseminate updated clinical practice guidance by November 2021.

This guidance will support Maternal and Child Health (MCH) nurses to respond to circumstances where family violence is suspected and how to document this in a clear and concise manner. The guidance will also provide information on how to proactively share information in accordance with

information sharing and mandatory reporting requirements for the purposes of assessing the risk of family violence and to ensure the safety of the victim survivor, infants, and children.

The *Maternal and Child Health Service Guidelines 2019, Additional Family Violence Consultation- Practice Note for Maternal and Child Health Nurses January 2021* and the *Maternal and Child Health Service Practice Guidelines 2009* will also be updated to reflect the new clinical practice guidance to support best practice.

Actions already implemented to support this recommendation include:

- Updating the *Additional Family Violence Consultation- Practice Note for Maternal and Child Health Nurses March 2018* in January 2021 to incorporate MCH responsibilities under the Family Violence Multi-Agency Risk Assessment and Management (MARAM) Framework and information sharing and mandatory reporting requirements under the Family Violence Information Sharing Scheme (FVISS) and the Child Information Sharing Scheme (CISS).
- MCH staff have undertaken training in FVISS and CISS and the MARAM Framework. MCH services will continue to receive further training in MARAM in late 2021 to understand their roles and responsibilities under the MARAM Framework.
- Extra funding for MCH services to provide additional family violence consultations to families at risk of, or experiencing, family violence. This funding is in addition to the routine screening undertaken by MCH nurses at the four-week Key Age and Stage visit. Nurses can also screen for family violence at any contact point with a client where family violence is suspected and/or professional judgement warrants.

RECOMMENDATION THREE

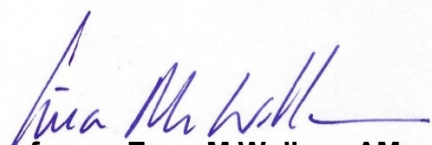
“That the Department of Health update the current policies and procedures governing the practice of MCH staff to reflect the guidelines provided in the Department of Families, Fairness and Housing’s Language Services Policy, specifically that family members are not to be used as interpreters in health service settings”.

Recommendation three will be implemented.

The department will work with Safer Care Victoria to develop and disseminate updated clinical practice guidance by November 2021 to strengthen outcomes for culturally and linguistically diverse children and families accessing and engaging with MCH services. The guidance will further inform MCH nurses of strategies and approaches to ensure the safe and effective use of interpreters and that it is never appropriate to use family members, friends or children as interpreters in critical contexts including where family violence is suspected. Guidance will also inform nurses of methods that lead to clear and concise documentation of clinical activities undertaken.

If you require further information please contact Camilla Macdonell, Director, Maternal and Child Health and Parenting at camilla.macdonell@health.vic.gov.au or on 0427 105 583.

Yours sincerely



Professor Euan M Wallace AM
Secretary

27/07/2021