

**CHILD DEATH REVIEW COMMITTEE
ANNUAL REPORT 2022-23**

Message from the Chair

I hereby submit the 2022-23 Annual Report for the Child Death Review Committee. The Committee is a Category 3 entity and this report was prepared under my direction and in accordance with the provisions of the **Transparency and Accountability Act**, for the period of April 1, 2022 to March 31, 2023.

As Chair of the Child Death Review Committee, I accept accountability for the results reported on behalf of the Committee and for the preparation of this report and the achievement of its objective.

A handwritten signature in blue ink, appearing to read "C. Barker Pinsent".

Catherine Barker Pinsent, MSW, RSW
Chair

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Overview

The Child Death Review Committee (the Committee) is a multi-disciplinary committee established pursuant to section 13.1(1) of the **Fatalities Investigation Act**. The Committee was first established in March 2014 and is comprised of seven members, who serve for a term established by the Lieutenant-Governor in Council, which is three years. As of March 31, 2023, the Committee members were:

- Catherine Barker Pinsent, Chair;
- Donna Ballard, K.C., Vice-Chair;
- Jo Anne Broders;
- Noreen Careen;
- Colleen Fox;
- Dr. Sandra Luscombe; and,
- Crystal Northcott.

The Chief Medical Examiner, Dr. Nebojsa Denic, also serves as an ex-officio member of the Committee.

The Committee meets to review the facts and circumstances of child deaths. A child death is defined as the death of a person under the age of majority whose death is reportable to the Office of the Chief Medical Examiner (OCME) under the **Fatalities Investigation Act**. In addition, the Committee also investigates maternal deaths which are deaths occurring during or following pregnancy in circumstances that might reasonably be related to pregnancy; or stillbirths or neonatal deaths where maternal injury has occurred or is suspected. The reviews involve consideration of the facts and information in the case files with access provided by the Office of the Chief Medical Examiner in addition to supplementary documentation required by the Committee.

As per ongoing practice, consultation with officials and staff of the Department of Justice and Public Safety (JPS) and other government departments occurs as necessary in relation to cases and procedures.

The Committee does not have a separate budget. Expenses are captured under the Administrative and Policy Support Activity Line within JPS's Budget.

Mandate

In accordance with its Mandate, the Committee is required to review child deaths, maternal deaths, and stillbirths or neonatal deaths as outlined in the **Fatalities Investigation Act**.

After each review, the Committee shall report to the Minister of Justice and Public Safety on its findings and submit to the Chief Medical Examiner all records relevant to the review. The Committee also monitors trends in these deaths, may make recommendations on identified trends and determines whether further review is necessary or desirable in the public interest. The Child Death Review Committee does not present separate Lines of Business as they are reflected in the Mandate.

Vision

A comprehensive review process that contributes to a reduction in the incidences of preventable child deaths, as well as maternal deaths related to pregnancy.

Highlights and Accomplishments

There were significant efforts made by JPS employees, the OCME, and the Chair to address transition matters for the Committee, including in the areas of recruitment, privacy, and technology, during 2022-23.

During the summer of 2022, the Chair, the Manager of Corporate Service at the OCME, and the Manager of Information Service in JPS reviewed the Committee's historical practices and records management. This resulted in the development of a database to capture relevant information, including case status, for all cases referred to the Committee by the OCME. The database is housed with the OCME. The Committee implemented new electronic data sharing processes to enable Committee members to access case information securely and complete their work. This is expected to enhance the Committee's ability to meet its Mandate. Committee members were supplied with government issued laptops to facilitate the work of the Committee in summer 2022 allowing members to access sensitive files, conduct reviews, and communicate securely in a more efficient manner.

Despite vacancies throughout the fiscal year, the Committee was still able to meet five times. Meetings commenced in October 2022. Given that the Committee had three vacant positions, meetings could only happen if the four appointed members were available. In February 2023, the Lieutenant-Governor in Council appointed three new members to serve on the Committee. This included the appointment of a new Vice-Chair. These appointments filled the outstanding vacancies and will help ensure quorum at meetings and to advance files.

The Committee continues to advocate for an appointment of a person who can represent the Indigenous populations of Newfoundland and Labrador and has experience advocating on behalf of children and women. In March 2023, the Chair met with the Director of the Office of Indigenous Affairs and Reconciliation, as well as JPS officials to discuss how best to include a new member. The Committee will continue to work with partners in JPS to find ways to address the need for strong Indigenous representation.

Report on Performance

Issue: Compliance with the Fatalities Investigations Act

The Committee reviews child deaths, monitors trends and makes recommendations to the Minister on matters related to the prevention of child deaths, including the need for inquiries. The review process involves an analysis of the facts contained in written reports and investigative material compiled by the Office of the Chief Medical Examiner and other reports identified as relevant by the Committee. The Committee prepares a report on its findings and submits it to the Minister of JPS. The objective for the Committee is consistent for the 2020-2023 planning period and the associated indicators will be reported on for each year of the planning period.

Objective: By March 31, 2023, the Child Death Review Committee will have reviewed child deaths, maternal deaths, and stillbirths or neonatal deaths in accordance with the **Fatalities Investigations Act**.

Indicators	Results
Meetings held as required to review child deaths referred from the Office of the Chief Medical Examiner	Five meetings were held in 2022-23 commencing in October 2022.
Submitted a report to the Minister on each child death review	10 child death reviews were submitted to the Minister during 2022-23.
Child death review records are submitted to the Chief Medical Examiner	All completed records remain with the Office of the Chief Medical Examiner
Child deaths reviewed collectively to identify trends, risk factors and recommendations for the prevention of child deaths	The Committee started the fiscal year, April 1, 2022, with a backlog of 15 cases (14 child deaths and one maternal death. Five cases were from 2020 and 10 cases were from 2021). Seven cases were referred during 2022-23 by the OCME. 11 cases were completed. As of March 31, 2023, seven cases were in the process of review. There were four cases still to be assigned as of March 31, 2023.
Recommendations from collective reviews are submitted to the Minister	On January 17, 2023, 10 child death reviews were forwarded to the Minister of JPS with one recommendation from the Committee. The recommendation was made public by the Minister at the following link: Public Advisory: Child Death Review Committee Case Review - News Releases (gov.nl.ca) .

Opportunities and Challenges

Fiscal 2022-23 presented significant challenges for the Child Death Review Committee. The resignation of a member prior to the commencement of file reviews left the committee with only four members. As a result, all members were required to be present for a meeting to make quorum. Another challenge for the Committee was to address a backlog of cases from previous years, as the Committee was not fully constituted. Without full membership, the Committee, decided to group reviews together by cause of death. This allowed file reviews to move forward while waiting for new members, recognizing that there were some files that would need to wait until members with specific expertise were appointed. The appointment of three new members in February 2023, completed the full membership of the Committee. A benefit of the new members is that appointment terms are now staggered. Continuing to turn the full membership over every three years would not have been beneficial to the work of the Committee and staggered appointments will better ensure there are experienced members available on the Committee.

Given that reviews could not start until the fall of 2022, it allowed time for Information Services staff of JPS, the Corporate Manager of the OCME, and the Chair of the Committee to review historical records, develop a database, and draft updated review procedures and electronic data sharing processes. This is anticipated to greatly assist the Committee's current work and to be of assistance to future Committees. While the majority of Committee meetings are held virtually, the Committee has requested funding for one in-person meeting per year as the members of the Committee live in different parts of the province. Through digitizing the Committee's reports and providing a common shared network drive to work from, the Committee's work will be improved and provide structure for the future. As the Committee does not have staff or office space, all documentation (current and historical) will reside with the OCME. An opportunity for 2023-24 is to review and update all Committee processes.

The Committee also continues to advocate for an appointment of a person who can represent the Indigenous populations of Newfoundland and Labrador who has experience advocating on behalf of children. The Committee would value the perspective and experience of a person who can represent the Indigenous populations of Newfoundland and Labrador in fulfilling its Mandate.

Financial Statements

The Committee does not have a separate budget. Expenses are captured under Administrative and Policy Support Activity Line within JPS.