



**Ministry of Human Services' Response to the
PO Fatality Inquiry Report**

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Background

The Ministry of Human Services has carefully reviewed the fatality inquiry report into the January 17, 2010 death of six-month-old PO, released on November 5, 2014.

The inquiry found that the cause of death was positional asphyxia and the manner of death was accidental. The child was in provincial government care at the time of death.

Fatality inquiries provide a valuable opportunity for an external review of tragic incidents involving individuals receiving services and supports from the ministry.

The ministry's response includes information gathered from the following sources:

- A review of existing policies in comparison to issues identified in the report;
- A review of current ministry initiatives and program directions related to issues identified in the report; and
- Engagement with internal ministry partners, including other divisions and our regional service delivery partners.

Response to the Recommendations

The Fatality Inquiry report included two recommendations for the ministry. The recommendations are focused on policy revisions and engagement in best practices for the use of bassinets and safe sleep practices for children in provincial care.

Recommendation 1: *A policy should be developed by the Department of Human Services which requires that foster care workers specifically advise foster parents to use bassinets only in accordance with the manufacturer's instructions and the Cribs, Cradles and Bassinets Regulations (SOR/2010-261). More specifically, the foster care case workers should be required by policy to ensure that the bassinets are assembled by foster parents strictly in accordance with the manufacturer's instructions.*

Ministry Response: The ministry accepts the intent of the recommendation, which is reflected in current policy and practice.

In 2011, policy was implemented to prohibit the use of bassinets, playpens and hammocks as sleeping arrangements. However, based on feedback from foster and kinship caregivers, this policy was revised in June 2012 to allow bassinets and playpens as temporary sleeping arrangements, for example, during travel or camping trips. Current policy states all bassinets and playpens must meet current government standards for safety as identified in the *Crib, Cradles and Bassinets Regulation*.

It remains a requirement that each foster child has a separate bed or crib as a permanent sleeping arrangement, based on the age and development of the child, which meets Canada's safety standards.

Prior to approving a foster home, and annually thereafter, a safety assessment is completed with foster parents. Among other elements, the safety assessment specifies that bassinets, playpens and hammocks must meet current government standards for safety and be assembled in accordance with the manufacturer's instructions.

Policy also provides up to date information on safe infant sleep practices and requires caregivers to be educated on the latest information to support safe infant sleeping. Links to provincial and federal resources related to safe sleep information are also maintained.

Recommendation 2: *The Department of Human Services should continue to undertake research to identify the best practices for the use of bassinets by foster parents and to prepare policies which inform foster care case workers of those best practices.*

Ministry Response: The ministry accepts the recommendation, which is reflected in current policy and practice. One of the ways the ministry remains abreast of current research and leading practices is through collaboration with many partners, including Alberta Health Services. For example, the ministry is an active participant on the Alberta Network for Safe and Healthy Children, a multidisciplinary group of professionals who work to prevent the maltreatment of children by supporting parents and increasing parental capacity.

Conclusion

The recommendations provided in this fatality inquiry are intended to protect the youngest, most vulnerable members of our society. The report highlights the need to support caregivers in adopting the latest evidence-based safe sleep practices for infants.

The ministry will continue to work collaboratively with our health partners and other service delivery partners to support child safety and well-being.