



Chapter 3. The California State Child Death Review Council (CSCDRC)

In order to provide additional assistance to counties in organizing and maintaining child death review teams (CDRTs), the California Legislature authorized the California Department of Justice (CDOJ) to create a state level team. In 1992, the California Attorney General established the State Child Death Review Council (SCDRC). The council is responsible for overseeing the statewide coordination and integration of state and local efforts to address fatal child abuse and neglect, and to create a body of information to prevent child deaths.¹⁶

About the State Child Death Review Council (CSCDRC)

The CSCDRC includes representatives from:

- California Department of Justice, Office of the Attorney General
- California Department of Health Services
- California Department of Social Services
- Office of Criminal Justice Planning
- Homicide Investigators Association
- California State Coroners Association
- County Welfare Directors Association
- Prevent Child Abuse - California
- California District Attorneys Association
- Northern California, Southern California and Bay Area Regional Child Death Review Team representatives
- Inter-Agency Council on Child Abuse and Neglect
- California Conference of Local Health Department Nursing Directors
- California Conference of Local Health Officers
- California Conference of Local Directors of Maternal, Child and Adolescent Health

The Department of Health Services (DHS), in coordination with DOJ and with guidance from the SCDRC, collects, analyzes and interprets state and local data on child deaths and publishes these findings in an annual report.¹⁷ The SCDRC also assists DOJ and the California Department of Social Services (CDSS) with coordinating statewide and local training for county CDRTs. DOJ is responsible for updating and providing each county team member with a Child Death

¹⁶ California Attorney General's Crime and Violence Prevention Center, "Child Abuse Prevention Program, State Child Death Review Council," 30 Sept. 2004 <http://www.SafeState.org/index.cfm?navid=110>.

¹⁷ Senate Bill 525, "Penal Code 11166.9 Legislative Mandate," Chapter 1012, Statutes of 1999, 30 Sept. 2004 <http://www.dhs.ca.gov/ps/cdic/epic/cms/documents/sb525chaptered.pdf>.

Review Team Directory. The purpose of the directory is to facilitate the exchange of information among agencies that have child death investigation and identification responsibilities. The directory includes the names, addresses, telephone numbers, and fax numbers of team members from the Sheriff's Departments, Police Departments, Coroner's Offices, District Attorney's Offices, and health and social service agencies.

The SCDRC continues to work on priority goals that have been established:

- Create and maintain an integrated, automated statewide data system for all counties and relevant state agencies; promote use of standardized forms and data collection protocols
- Foster increased communication among state and local teams, as well as communication with other states, federal agencies and national associations, to include dissemination of data and a statewide directory
- Address local, state and federal policy legislation issues and guidelines; continue to seek additional resources and funding for county team efforts
- Support the development of domestic violence death review teams (DVDRTs); promote increased awareness of the relationship between domestic violence and child abuse.
- Promote development of the small county model (i.e., multi-county teams or cluster groups) for counties with populations under 20,000
- Raise the visibility of child deaths and CDRTs in California through ongoing public education programs and the annual state report
- Promote education and training for child death review team members; develop an evaluation process to assess team effectiveness
- Increase public and professional awareness of psychosocial issues related to child death such as SIDS, fetal/infant mortality, family grief and mourning, and child death review team burnout
- Further define the tasks and duties of SCDRC members
- Encourage continued research efforts at the state and federal level regarding child deaths and related issues

The SCDRC is currently developing new priority goals to direct its work through future years.

Efforts to Assist County Teams

Information about the magnitude and cause of child deaths is a prerequisite for the development of effective strategies for preventing future deaths. *Improving Data Collection on Child Fatalities: A Plan for Action* was submitted in response to a legislative mandate (AB 67, Chapter 606). The mandate required the CDSS, DHS and DOJ to develop a plan to track and maintain

data on child deaths from abuse and neglect and submit this plan to the Senate Committee on Health and Human Services, Assembly Committee on Human Services, and chairs of the Legislature's fiscal committees.¹⁸

The State departments referenced above and the SCDRC are committed to obtaining more accurate data. Such data is used to improve policy, procedures and practices that will result in better protection of children. The plan provides a description of actions that will be taken to improve the data collection system. These actions include:

- Training local CDRTS to better identify and report fatalities resulting from abuse and neglect
- Providing technical assistance to local teams on request
- Publishing the annual Child Deaths in California report
- Increasing the number of teams piloting a new data collection instrument, and
- Improving reports produced by local teams

The process of receiving more accurate data will be successful only by providing counties with technical assistance and training. The Los Angeles Interagency Council on Child Abuse and Neglect (ICAN) conducted a series of statewide training sessions through a grant from OCJP and CDSS commencing in 1998. The training focuses on providing local CDRTs with supportive protocols, information about data sources, common definitions, and workshops for teams to experiment and refine their operations.

¹⁸ Senate Bill 525.