



COMMISSION TO ELIMINATE  
CHILD ABUSE AND NEGLECT FATALITIES

## PHOENIX PUBLIC MEETING HIGHLIGHTS—January 12-13, 2015

The Commission to Eliminate Child Abuse and Neglect Fatalities convened for public deliberations at the Sheraton Phoenix Downtown in Phoenix, Arizona, on January 12-13, 2015. The purpose of this meeting was for Commission members to discuss their understanding of the issues of defining and counting child abuse and neglect fatalities and recommendations for addressing them. The Commission is charged in the Protect Our Kids Act of 2012 to identify methods of improving data collection and utilization, such as increasing interoperability among state and local data systems and recommending guidelines for the type of information that should be tracked to improve interventions to prevent fatalities from abuse and neglect.

Beginning on January 12 and continuing on January 13, Commission members also discussed the work plans of the other Commission subcommittees and the information that they have obtained to date. This brief provides highlights from the meeting.

A full transcript and meeting minutes will be available on the Commission's website at <https://eliminatechildabusefatalities.sites.usa.gov/event/commission-meeting/>

### MEASUREMENT DISCUSSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS

The Measurement Subcommittee summarized the information that has been presented to Commissioners thus far on the subject of counting child abuse and neglect fatalities and on the prevalence and counting of near-fatal injuries. The subcommittee then proposed seven overarching recommendations (and a number of more specific recommendations) for Commissioner discussion. These recommendations included actions that could be implemented by states and the federal government.

Commissioners generally agreed with the direction that the subcommittee proposed, although further detail and consideration is needed in a number of areas before final specific recommendations will be reached. Issues addressed in the discussion included the following:

- Why understanding the scope of the issue is important
- Why clarity around the definition of what is counted as a child abuse and neglect fatality is needed
- The need to improve the collection of data on American Indian/Alaska Native (AI/AN) children
- State and tribal capacity and resources needed to address recommendations regarding improving the count of fatalities due to abuse and neglect
- The recent passage of the Sudden Unexpected Death Data Enhancement Awareness Act (H.R. 669)

- How congressional oversight and regulations might be strengthened
- The importance of national leadership and potential new role of a federal agency to oversee counting and measurement (including the possibility of assigning this responsibility to an existing agency) to ensure clear responsibility and improved measurement
- The potential inclusion of near fatalities in data collection efforts to better understand child abuse and neglect fatalities, because the difference between a fatality and near fatality is often due to timing and level of medical intervention rather than to differences in risk profiles
- The need to improve our understanding of the number of children who are known to child welfare prior to a child abuse and neglect fatality
- The need to look at state models that integrate data on all child abuse and neglect fatalities

It was agreed that the Measurement Subcommittee would contemplate the feedback, consider revisions to its recommendations, and come back to the Commission with updated recommendations. The Measurement Subcommittee also will propose a process for identifying a more accurate estimate of annual child abuse and neglect fatalities and provide further clarity around proposed recommendations to standardize definitions.

#### **AMERICAN INDIAN/ALASKA NATIVE SUBCOMMITTEE**

The AI/AN Subcommittee reported that its major areas of focus so far are jurisdictional issues, data collection, and death investigation teams/accountability. Subcommittee members noted that trying to create consistency with regard to jurisdictional issues will be challenging. In the meantime, there is a need to invite tribes to work with the Commission to share their challenges and explore the most effective and culturally respectful way to collect better data about child abuse and neglect deaths of AI/AN children. Another area of interest is preventing deaths of older children who are at risk of committing suicide as a result of adverse childhood experiences.

This subcommittee is working toward bringing experts to present on AI/AN issues at the Commission's state public meeting in March, and it will propose recommendations following that meeting.

#### **CPS SUBCOMMITTEE**

The CPS Subcommittee identified four areas of the child welfare system that it will investigate: safety decision-making, workforce/workload issues (including turnover), evidence around the impact of practice on child abuse and neglect fatalities, and system resources. Questions were raised about whether children should be defined as "known to the child welfare system" based on reports regarding the child only, or the family as a whole; and whether children who are subject to a screened-out or unsubstantiated report should be included in this category. Without a consistent approach to this question across jurisdictions, it is difficult to assess the effectiveness of the current system.

There also was discussion about the lack of a research base on effective practice, and the impact of limited resources on state and local child protection efforts. There was general agreement that the response from the current CPS system is not commensurate with the risks faced by the most vulnerable groups of children. Commissioners requested that the CPS Subcommittee conduct more research and present a recommendation for a more effective, multidisciplinary approach to

protecting children at greatest risk, including an assessment of any evidence available to support such a strategy.

## **DISPROPORTIONALITY SUBCOMMITTEE**

Thus far, the Disproportionality Subcommittee’s work has consisted of reviewing reports by prior Commissions to identify any recommendations addressing minority populations and disproportionality. Commissioners agree that disproportionality in death rates for minority children is a significant concern that will need to be addressed in order to achieve the Commission’s goal of eliminating child abuse and neglect fatalities. Commission members made a number of recommendations for how to proceed, including the following:

- Identify the current research base around disproportionality.
- Look at the impact of kinship care policies on the well-being of minority families.
- Review the research on infant mortality rates and the Adverse Childhood Experiences (ACE) Study.
- Consider the impact of poverty versus race.
- Look beyond the child welfare system, toward a multidisciplinary response to shore up resources and resilience to stress in struggling households.
- Understand the need for cultural *engagement*, not just cultural competency. Recommend policies and procedures that help professionals within the system make good decisions for and with all families.

## **PUBLIC HEALTH SUBCOMMITTEE**

The intention of the Public Health Subcommittee is to take the wider lens of a population-health approach to examine the issue of child abuse and neglect fatalities. This subcommittee has sought to identify state and federal programs (other than child welfare) that often touch families prior to a fatality or near fatality due to child abuse and neglect occurring and what may be the additional “levers” for prevention. Commissioners and staff are scheduling a number of meetings with related agencies to build understanding, engagement, and collaboration at a federal level; they also are continuing to put together state and local panels on public health approaches for upcoming Commission meetings.

The subcommittee’s second strategy will be to review and assess the strength of the evidence supporting specific prevention programs, such as home visiting and place-based approaches. There also was considerable discussion about how to better engage Medicaid, through pediatric quality measures, claims data, EPSDT services, and/or dual-generation funding strategies—this will be the focus of an upcoming conversation with the Centers for Medicare and Medicaid Services. Commissioners provided input but generally agreed with the subcommittee’s proposed approach.

## **MILITARY SUBCOMMITTEE**

The Military Subcommittee is pleased with the level of cooperation they have received from military branches thus far. In the next month or two, the subcommittee will be finalizing a list of questions to address through the Department of Defense’s central Office on Family Advocacy. The Commission also has been invited to give a presentation at a meeting of Family Advocacy Program staff in March. At the same time, the subcommittee will work in a parallel way to connect with the Army’s research arm regarding data related to child abuse and neglect fatalities within military families. Significant

areas of concern for the military include confidentiality restrictions, which can prevent Family Advocacy staff from working effectively with state and local CPS agencies; the availability of resources for Family Advocacy Programs; and the stresses that military families experience during periods of deployment and when soldiers return home. However, the armed services also have some robust prevention services that the subcommittee would like to explore.

## **POLICY SUBCOMMITTEE**

The Policy Subcommittee is tracking its efforts very closely to the purposes of the Commission as established in the Protect Our Kids Act. They are looking at four broad areas: effectiveness of existing federal and state programs, accountability (at both the federal and state levels), efficiency of programs, and coordination/collaboration among programs. In general, they want to look at strengths and weaknesses of existing programs, and how those programs can be better supported or improved if needed. Although the Commission seems to be in general agreement that a standardized definition of child abuse and neglect fatalities has the potential to support a more accurate count, concerns were raised about the feasibility of such standardization from a policy perspective. For the next meeting, the Measurement Subcommittee will put forth its proposal for standardization (among other recommendations). The Policy Subcommittee can then consider in more detail the implications of this recommendation for federal law and policy. In addition, the Policy Subcommittee is working closely with the other subcommittees by assisting them with legislative and regulatory analysis of specific programs and policies within each subcommittee's purview.