



COMMISSION TO ELIMINATE  
CHILD ABUSE AND NEGLECT FATALITIES

## **Child Abuse and Neglect Fatalities (CANF): Part of a Continuum or Distinct Phenomena?**

Question: Are CANF along the continuum of child maltreatment or are they distinct events with unique etiological characteristics? If they are distinct events, then using research related to child maltreatment overall cannot be extended to understand CANF. This limits how we can apply research on risk and protective factors and interventions that may impact the reduction of CANF. In addition, the idea of 'known to CPS' would not really be relevant as a predictor of CANF. Further, this informs our understanding of near fatalities, and whether their tracking and their target for prevention should be incorporated into broader CANF prevention.

There are two possible hypotheses:

- (1) Fatalities are part of a continuum of risk where the children with the most severe risk profiles are the most likely to die. With this hypothesis, risk profiles are determined by multiple factors including individual, family and community risk factors, each of which has its own severity and all of which interact with each other and may or may not be accompanied by protective factors. The basis of the current approach of fatality and near-fatality, of using prior reports as risk for future harm, and of predictive analytics all are based on the model that CANF are at the very extreme part of the continuum of risk.
- (2) Fatalities are distinct events that are both idiosyncratic and non-predictable or come about as a result of a risk profile which accompanies non-fatal maltreatment. If one believes that this hypothesis is correct, then the implication is that the current body of research and the current approach to prevention of maltreatment in general would have little impact on reducing the number of fatalities and that a completely different approach is needed.

It is possible that there is a combination of these hypotheses at work.