



May 6, 2024

Contact: Kella Hatcher, Executive Director, kella.hatcher@dhhs.nc.gov; Karen McLeod, Co-Chair, kmcleod@benchmarksnc.org; Jill Cox, Co-Chair, JCox@cisnc.org; see footnote for additional information.

New policies set to impact the rise in child deaths

Child Fatality Task Force releases 2024 Annual Report and hosts child death data webinar

RALEIGH — The [North Carolina Child Fatality Task Force](#) (Task Force) has submitted its [2024 Annual Report](#) to Governor Roy Cooper and the NC General Assembly. The report contains data on child deaths, updates on Task Force work, and recommendations for changes in law and state funding to prevent child deaths and promote child well-being.

In 2023, the NC General Assembly passed legislation that addressed many Task Force recommendations, among them: laws and funding to strengthen the statewide child fatality prevention system; laws to strengthen infant safe surrender; a law to implement a statewide firearm safety initiative; funds to prevent sleep-related infant deaths; funds to enable comprehensive toxicology testing in medical examiner jurisdiction child deaths; and Medicaid funding for strategies to promote healthy pregnancies and birth outcomes.

“2023 was a banner year for the Task Force with so many of our recommendations becoming law. However, it’s disheartening to see overall child death rates rise for the second year in a row, and we know we have a great deal of work ahead to help advance laws and strategies to save kids’ lives,” said Karen McLeod, co-chair of the Task Force.

Latest available child death data from the NC State Center for Health Statistics shows that in 2022, 1,474 North Carolina children ages 17 or younger died. The rate of child deaths overall in 2022 was an 8% increase over the 2021 rate, and the highest rate recorded since 2009. The 2022 infant mortality rate remained unchanged from the 2021 rate, which had ranked North Carolina as the 10th highest rate in the nation (2022 rates for all states are not yet available).

[Recommendations from the Task Force for 2024](#) reflect a continued focus on the importance of firearm safe storage through seeking sustained funding for the [NC S.A.F.E. firearm safety campaign](#) and the newly created [NC Office of Violence Prevention](#), as well as an effort to strengthen the state’s child access prevention law.

Other 2024 recommendations continue the Task Force’s work on suicide prevention and the youth mental health crisis by seeking sustained funding for more school nurses, social workers, counselors, and psychologists and through endorsing legislation that targets addictive social media algorithms that harm kids.

Additional recommendations seek to prevent infant deaths, improve birth outcomes, and close disparity gaps through Medicaid funding to expand the use of doulas and through legislation that will support the creation and effective operation of [Fetal and Infant Mortality Review](#) teams in our state.

Finally, the Task Force is echoing the voices of many who are seeking to expand funding for the early child care system at a time when the system is in crisis. Ensuring access to affordable, quality child care is a well-recognized strategy to support overall child and family well-being *and* prevent child maltreatment.

On May 13 at 11 a.m., the Task Force is hosting a webinar that will address the recently released 2022 [child death data](#) and [infant mortality data](#) from the NC State Center for Health Statistics. Epidemiologist Kathleen Jones-Vessey, with the NC Department of Health and Human Services’ Division of Public Health, will explain the latest highlights and trends from the data. Members of the Child Fatality Task Force are invited, however, this is not a Task Force meeting and anyone who has an interest in this data can register to attend the webinar [here](#).

For questions about the work of the Task Force and its 2024 Annual Report and recommendations, please contact Kella Hatcher, Karen McLeod or Jill Cox. For more information about 2022 child death or infant mortality data, please register for the data webinar noted above, and/or contact NC DHHS at news@dhhs.nc.gov.