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Child Fatality Task Force releases annual report with recommendations to save lives

RALEIGH — The [North Carolina Child Fatality Task Force](#) (Task Force) has submitted its [2025 Annual Report](#) to Governor Josh Stein and the NC General Assembly. The report contains updates on Task Force work and recommendations for changes in law and state funding from its [2025 Action Agenda](#) to prevent child deaths and promote child well-being. Several recommendations for this year continue work in areas that remain critical, while two new recommendations are aimed at preventing harm from tobacco, nicotine, and intoxicating cannabis products.

The 2025 annual report also contains recently released 2023 data on child deaths, including infants. The rate of child deaths overall in 2023 was 61.5 per 100,000 NC children ages 0 to 17, which is a slight decrease from the 2022 rate of 63.3, but still the second highest rate recorded since 2009. Many areas of concern seen in the 2023 data have also been present in recent years, such as: infant mortality rates that are the 10th highest in the nation; high rates of firearm deaths that have contributed to an overall rise in homicides and suicides in recent years; and motor vehicle injuries that continue to be a leading cause of death for most age groups. An area of concern that has worsened is disparities; in 2023 Black infants died at rates three times of white infants. Highlights of these and other 2023 data points and trends are contained in the annual report.

Recommendations that continue Task Force work from prior years address the following:

- Preventing firearm deaths through sustained support for the [NC S.A.F.E.](#) firearm safe storage initiative and strengthening our state's firearm safe storage law.
- To address the youth mental health crisis and prevent youth suicide, support for legislation to combat addictive algorithms in social media that harm children, and support for funding for more school nurses, social workers, counselors, and psychologists because schools have far too few to meet students' needs.
- Funding to expand the use of doulas and funding to support initiatives that prevent sleep-related infant deaths as these strategies address a high infant mortality rate, worsening disparities, and the loss of over 100 babies each year due to unsafe sleep situations.
- Supporting growth and investments in our child care system because evidence is clear that ensuring access to affordable child care is essential for child well-being and can prevent child maltreatment and even death.
- To prevent motor vehicle deaths, strengthening our child passenger safety laws which are outdated and do not reflect best practice.

New recommendations related to harms from tobacco, nicotine, and intoxicating cannabis products support legislation to address age restrictions, the licensing of retailers, and safer packaging, all of which are necessary to protect kids, because:

- North Carolina is one of only seven states that has not increased its minimum age for tobacco product sales to 21 to match federal law, and is one of only nine states that does not require a license or permit for tobacco retailers; meanwhile, youth vaping is an epidemic in our state even though harms to youth from vaping are well-established and can result in death.
- North Carolina fails to regulate access to intoxicating cannabis products that are widely available in a variety of forms attractive to kids such as candy and baked goods. Since 2019 and following a surge in the availability of these products, the rate of emergency department visits in North Carolina for intoxicating cannabis ingestion among children and youth increased dramatically.

“As a parent, I was shocked to learn that a child or teen of any age could walk into a vape shop and purchase something that looks like their favorite snack but may be infused with high levels of intoxicating cannabis that can cause serious harm,” said Karen McLeod co-chair of the Task Force. “I think most parents and adults don’t realize what’s going on, and it’s unacceptable that our state is not regulating these products to protect kids.”

On March 17th at 2:00 pm, the Task Force is hosting a webinar that will address the recently released [2023 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. Anyone can register to attend the webinar [here](#).

** For questions about the work of the Task Force and its 2025 Annual Report and recommendations, please contact Kella Hatcher, Karen McLeod or Jill Cox. For more information about 2023 child death or infant mortality data, please register for the data webinar noted above, and/or contact NCDHHS at news@dhhs.nc.gov.*