



# QUEENSLAND PARLIAMENT **COMMITTEES**

## **Oversight of the Queensland Child and Family Commission**

Justice, Integrity and Community Safety Committee



**Report No. 16**

**58th Parliament, August 2025**

## **Justice, Integrity and Community Safety Committee**

<b>Chair</b>	Mr Marty Hunt MP, Member for Nicklin
<b>Deputy Chair</b>	Mr Peter Russo MP, Member for Toohey
<b>Members</b>	Mr Michael Berkman MP, Member for Maiwar
	Mr Russell Field MP, Member for Capalaba
	Ms Natalie Marr MP, Member for Thuringowa
	Mrs Melissa McMahon MP, Member for Macalister

## **Committee Secretariat**

<b>Telephone</b>	07 3553 6641
<b>Email</b>	<a href="mailto:JICSC@parliament.qld.gov.au">JICSC@parliament.qld.gov.au</a>
<b>Committee Webpage</b>	<a href="http://www.parliament.qld.gov.au/jicsc">www.parliament.qld.gov.au/jicsc</a>

All references and webpages are current at the time of publishing.

## **Acknowledgements**

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## Table of Contents

<b>Chair's Foreword</b> .....	<b>iii</b>
<b>Recommendations</b> .....	<b>iv</b>
<b>Glossary</b> .....	<b>v</b>
<b>1. Introduction</b> .....	<b>1</b>
1.1. Purpose and functions of the QFCC .....	1
1.2. Committee oversight of the QFCC .....	1
1.3. Commissioners .....	2
1.4. The committee's oversight process .....	2
1.5. The committee's oversight process .....	2
<b>2. Examination of Annual Report 2023-24</b> .....	<b>3</b>
2.1. Key highlights and achievements .....	3
2.2. Performance of the QFCC .....	4
2.2.1. Ensuring systems are accountable .....	4
2.2.2. Raising awareness and advocating .....	5
2.2.3. Empowering children, young people and their families .....	6
2.2.4. Supporting, connecting and collaborating with other organisations .....	7
2.2.5. Building QFCC's capacity, capability and culture .....	7
2.3. Performance of Queensland's child protection system .....	7
2.3.1. Supporting families earlier .....	8
2.3.2. Sufficient resources to provide quality support services .....	8
2.3.3. Upholding the rights of the children and young people in out of home care and detention .....	9
2.3.4. Meeting the needs and upholding the rights of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children, families, and communities .....	9
2.3.5. A collaborative and accountable system .....	10
<b>3. Child Death Review Board Annual Report 2023-24</b> .....	<b>10</b>
3.1.1. Monitoring of progress of 2022-23 recommendations .....	11
3.1.2. New recommendations .....	11
<b>4. Oversight hearing</b> .....	<b>12</b>
4.1. Key achievements in 2023-24 .....	12
4.2. Significant changes to role and size of the QFCC .....	13
4.3. Review of, and reforms to, the Blue Card scheme .....	13
4.4. Impact of detention on the mental health of children .....	14
4.5. QFCC view on Making Queensland Safer laws .....	14
4.6. Child safeguarding education .....	14
4.7. First Nations and Child Rights Advocacy team .....	14
<b>Appendix A – Public Hearing, 13 March 2025</b> .....	<b>16</b>

## Chair's Foreword

The Justice, Integrity and Community Safety Committee (committee) has oversight responsibilities for the Queensland Family and Child Commission (QFCC). This report presents a summary of the committee's oversight for the 2023-24 financial year.

The committee reviewed the *Queensland Family and Child Commission Annual Report 2023–2024*, the *Child Death Review Board Annual Report 2023-2024*, and held a public hearing with QFCC Commissioners on 13 March 2025.

In 2023-24, the QFCC continued to provide evidence-based oversight of Queensland's child protection and youth justice systems, contributed to the development of policy in these areas, and influenced several important reforms and initiatives. By maintaining the Child Death Register, and hosting the Child Death Review Board, the QFCC has played a vital role in fostering learning, prevention and reform of child safety.

The QFCC works to keep Queensland's children safe and ensure that the state's child protection and youth justice systems are held accountable. On behalf of the committee, I would like to thank the QFCC for their work during 2023-24, and for their assistance with the committee's oversight for this reporting period. I also extend my thanks to the Parliamentary Service staff for their work on this report.

I commend this report to the House.



Marty Hunt

Chair

## **Recommendations**

<b>Recommendation 1 .....</b>	<b>15</b>
<b>That the committee recommends that the House notes the contents of this report.</b>	

## Glossary

<b>CDRB</b>	Child Death Review Board
<b>CDRB Annual Report</b>	CDRB Annual Report 2023-24
<b>FCC Act</b>	<i>Family and Child Commission Act 2014</i>
<b>QFCC</b>	Queensland Family and Child Commission
<b>Committee</b>	Justice, Integrity and Community Safety Committee
<b>FCC Act</b>	Family and Child Commission Annual Report 2023-2024
<b>QFCC Annual Report</b>	QFCC Annual Report 2023-24

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## 1. Introduction

The Justice, Integrity and Community Safety Committee (committee) has oversight responsibilities for the Queensland Family and Child Commission (QFCC). This includes monitoring and reviewing QFCC's performance, examining annual reports, and reporting to the Legislative Assembly.<sup>1</sup> This report presents the committee's examination of the *Queensland Family and Child Commission Annual Report 2023–2024* and the *Child Death Review Board Annual Report 2023–2024*, pursuant to its oversight function.

### 1.1. Purpose and functions of the QFCC

The purpose of the QFCC is to promote the safety, wellbeing and best interests of children and young people and improve the child protection system. As outlined in the *Family and Child Commission Act 2014 Act* (FCC Act), the responsibilities of the QFCC include:

- oversight of the child protection system
- promotion and advocacy regarding the responsibilities of families and communities to protect and care for children and young people, including their safety and wellbeing, particularly those in the child protection or youth justice system
- providing research, assistance, capacity building and leadership for agencies involved in the child protection system
- increasing collaboration across different sectors to improve the delivery of services to children, young people and families
- reviewing, analysing and evaluating systemic policies and practices relevant to the child protection system
- informing and educating the community
- reporting to the Minister about matters relating to its functions.<sup>2</sup>

The QFCC hosts the Child Death Review Board (CDRB) for administrative purposes.<sup>3</sup> The CDRB conducts systemic reviews following the death of a child connected to the child protection system and can make recommendations about systemic improvements to practices which respond to the findings of such reviews.<sup>4</sup>

### 1.2. Committee oversight of the QFCC

The committee has the following oversight functions with regard to the QFCC:

- monitoring and reviewing QFCC's performance of its functions
- reporting to the Legislative Assembly on:

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<sup>1</sup> Standing Orders, SO 194A, sch 6.

<sup>2</sup> Family and Child Commission Act 2014 (FCC Act), s 9.

<sup>3</sup> FCC Act, pt 3A.

<sup>4</sup> FCC Act, s 29D.

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- any matter concerning the QFCC, the QFCC's functions or the performance of those functions that the committee considers should be drawn to the Legislative Assembly's attention
  - any changes to the functions, structures and procedures of the QFCC that the committee considers desirable for the more effective operation of the entity or of the FCC Act
  - examining the QFCC's annual reports, and, if appropriate, commenting on any aspect of the report.<sup>5</sup>

### **1.3. Commissioners**

The FCC Act provides for the QFCC to have 2 commissioners,<sup>6</sup> who may hold office for a term of no more than 3 years.<sup>7</sup> One of the commissioners is to be appointed as the Principal Commissioner and at least one person who acts as a commissioner must be an Aboriginal or Torres Strait Islander person.<sup>8</sup>

Luke Twyford was appointed Chief Executive and Principal Commissioner for an initial 3-year term expiring on 24 December 2024.<sup>9</sup> On 20 December 2024, Mr Twyford was reappointed as Principal Commissioner for a further 3 years expiring on 24 December 2027.

Natalie Lewis was appointed as Commissioner of the QFCC in June 2020. Ms Lewis is a descendant of the Gamilaraay Nation and was first appointed for an initial 3-year term before being reappointed for another 3 years from 1 June 2023 to 31 May 2026.<sup>10</sup>

### **1.4. The committee's oversight process**

The committee's process for oversight of the QFCC includes:

- reviewing each annual report of the QFCC
- conducting a public hearing with the QFCC
- tabling a report on the committee's oversight, including a review of the QFCC's annual report.

### **1.5. The committee's oversight process**

In conducting its oversight of the QFCC, the committee:

- examined the *Queensland Family and Child Commission Annual Report 2023–2024*

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<sup>5</sup> Standing Orders, SO 194A.

<sup>6</sup> FCC Act, s 11 (1).

<sup>7</sup> FCC Act, s 13.

<sup>8</sup> FCC Act, s 11(5).

<sup>9</sup> Queensland Government, 'Appointment of Principal Commissioner to the Queensland Family and Child Commission', cabinet document, 25 December 2021,

<sup>10</sup> Queensland Government, 'Appointment of a Commissioner to the Queensland Family and Child Commission', cabinet document, May 2023.



- 
- examined the *Child Death Review Board Annual Report 2023-2024*, and
  - held a public hearing with QFCC Commissioners on 13 March 2025.

The transcript of the public hearing is available on the committee's webpage.

## **2. Examination of Annual Report 2023-24**

The QFCC's 2023-24 Annual Report was tabled on 13 September 2024 (QFCC Annual Report). It provides information about the QFCC's performance in relation to its strategic objectives and priorities, the performance of Queensland's child protection system, the QFCC's financial position and its compliance with legislative requirements.

The QFCC Annual Report was made pursuant to section 40 of the FCC Act. It meets QFCC's reporting obligations under the *Financial Accountability Act 2009* and the annual report requirements for Queensland Government agencies.

### **2.1. Key highlights and achievements**

Key highlights and achievements identified in the QFCC Annual Report include:

- the completion of 14 oversight reviews in respect of statutory child protection systems and other systemic issues impacting children and families<sup>11</sup>
- making 20 formal recommendations to government to improve systems for children, young people and their families<sup>12</sup>
- making 32 formal submissions to state, federal and international reviews and inquiries<sup>13</sup>
- being featured in 2,385 media reports (which was a 293 per cent increase from the previous year)<sup>14</sup>
- the collection of experiences from over 4,600 Queenslanders through a range of engagement activities and surveys<sup>15</sup>
- publishing 10 reports and insight papers including on the topics of young people who are absent from care placements, how Queensland upholds children's rights and actions required for successful implementation of the Queensland Government's *Residential Care Roadmap*<sup>16</sup>
- QFCC commissioners and staff travelling extensively across the state to present at conferences, appear at hearings and inquiries, and meet with stakeholders, particularly in regional and remote areas<sup>17</sup>

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<sup>11</sup> QFCC, *Annual Report 2023-24* (QFCC Annual Report), p 9.

<sup>12</sup> QFCC Annual Report, p 9.

<sup>13</sup> QFCC Annual Report, p 9.

<sup>14</sup> QFCC Annual Report, p 9.

<sup>15</sup> QFCC Annual Report, p 9.

<sup>16</sup> QFCC Annual Report, p 10.

<sup>17</sup> QFCC Annual Report, p 10.

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- making 13 requests for information from public entities under section 35 of the FCC Act<sup>18</sup>
  - partnering with 13 government agencies, non-government organisations and community stakeholders and distributing more than \$980,000 of funding to related initiatives.<sup>19</sup>

## **2.2. Performance of the QFCC**

The QFCC Annual Report documents the QFCC's performance in relation to 5 key objectives:

1. Ensuring systems are accountable for the impact they have on children and families
2. Raising awareness and advocating for children and their families
3. Empowering children, young people and their families to influence decisions that affect their lives
4. Supporting, connecting and collaborating with organisations that advance the rights, safety and wellbeing of children
5. Building QFCC's capacity, capability and culture to achieve its vision.<sup>20</sup>

The following sections discuss the QFCC's performance against each of these objectives.

### **2.2.1. Ensuring systems are accountable**

The QFCC works to ensure systems are accountable for the impact they have on children and families by monitoring and reviewing systems, monitoring and reporting on child deaths, and making recommendations for improvements to systems.

#### Monitoring and reviewing systems

Throughout 2023-24, the QFCC undertook reviews and published reports on the effect of a wide range of systems on children, young people and families. This included:

- reports on the support offered to children exiting youth detention, the reasons why young people are being held for longer periods in watch houses in Queensland, and the risks faced by children whose parents use methamphetamine<sup>21</sup>
- 'discovery reviews' on topics including childhood independence, absence from care, carer allowances, the future of foster care and young parents.<sup>22</sup>

The QFCC undertook important statistical work relating to the overrepresentation of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children in Queensland's child protection system and

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<sup>18</sup> QFCC Annual Report, p 10.

<sup>19</sup> QFCC Annual Report, p 10.

<sup>20</sup> QFCC Annual Report, p 13.

<sup>21</sup> For a full list of reports published, see QFCC Annual Report, pp 24-31.

<sup>22</sup> QFCC Annual Report, pp 31-33.

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the ‘crossover cohort’, children and young people who have had contact with both the youth justice system and child protection system.<sup>23</sup>

According to the QFCC, its review and reports contributed to several legislative and policy changes made by the Queensland Government. These included:

- legislative changes to the Blue Card scheme following the release of the QFCC’s *Thematic analysis of the blue card scheme* report
- improved reporting to oversight bodies on watch houses following the release of the QFCC’s report titled *Who’s responsible: understanding why young people are being held longer in Queensland watch houses*
- the establishment of a peak body for youth justice (influenced by the QFCC’s *Queensland Child Rights Report 2023*)
- the introduction of the Child Safe Organisations Bill 2024 (influenced by the QFCC’s *Submission on the Review of the QFCC Act*).<sup>24</sup>

#### Monitoring and reporting on child deaths

The QFCC is responsible for maintaining and reporting on the Queensland Child Death Register, which records the deaths of all children and young people in Queensland. In March 2024, the QFCC tabled its *Annual Report: Deaths of children and young people in Queensland 2022-23*. Preliminary data for the 2023-24 report indicates a decrease in child deaths, with 422 recorded deaths compared to 448 in 2022-23.<sup>25</sup>

The QFCC provides access to the Child Death Register to facilitate learnings from child death statistics and exploration of child death preventative measures. In 2023-2024, the QFCC responded to 25 requests from researchers and government agencies for detailed data from the register.<sup>26</sup>

#### Recommendations

In 2023-24, the QFCC made a total of 20 recommendations for improvements to systems that impact the wellbeing of Queensland children, young people and families, and an additional 40 explicit expectations. In 2024, work also commenced on the QFCC’s biennial review of open government recommendations, including the development of a status classification scheme to group recommendations for ease of monitoring.<sup>27</sup>

#### **2.2.2. Raising awareness and advocating**

Throughout 2023-24, the QFCC contributed evidence-based advice and solutions to government on a broad range of policy and legislative issues impacting the safety,

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<sup>23</sup> QFCC Annual Report, pp 34-38.

<sup>24</sup> QFCC Annual Report, pp 22, 113. See pp 22-23 for further examples.

<sup>25</sup> QFCC Annual Report, p 38.

<sup>26</sup> QFCC Annual Report, p 40.

<sup>27</sup> QFCC Annual Report, p 41.

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wellbeing and best interests of children and families. It did this through several channels, including by:

- making 32 written submissions to state and national reviews and inquiries, including numerous inquiries conducted by committees of the Queensland Parliament<sup>28</sup>
- providing evidence at a range of hearings, including several hearings conducted by committees of the Queensland Parliament<sup>29</sup>
- using its reports to call for reform on key systems affecting children, most notably the Blue Card scheme<sup>30</sup>
- sharing its evidence and insights at cross-sector conferences and panels, including the Queensland Foster and Kinship Care Conference and the 2024 Childhood Summit<sup>31</sup>
- publishing several key reports, including the First Nations Children's Report 2023 and the Queensland Child Rights Report 2023<sup>32</sup>
- funding or sponsoring key events, including Children's Week 2023 and Queensland Child Protection Week 2023<sup>33</sup>

The QFCC documented the reach of its awareness and advocacy activities online and through the media, noting that the vast majority (93 per cent) of its mentions in the media were positive or very positive.<sup>34</sup>

### **2.2.3. Empowering children, young people and their families**

To empower children, young people and their families, the QFCC undertook a variety of activities in the 2023-24 financial year. This included:

- sponsoring a forum for young people with lived experience of residential care, to inform the *I was raised by a checklist* report
- hosting the first QFCC Youth Summit
- partnering with the Australian School of Entrepreneurship to deliver the Youth Leaders Summit Cairns
- undertaking the ParentVoice survey
- sponsoring the production of the youth-led film, Grape
- employing youth advocates to share their thoughts, views and experiences

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<sup>28</sup> For a full list, see QFCC Annual Report, pp 44-46.

<sup>29</sup> For a full list, see QFCC Annual Report, pp 46-47.

<sup>30</sup> QFCC Annual Report, p 47.

<sup>31</sup> For a full list, see QFCC Annual Report, p 48.

<sup>32</sup> QFCC Annual Report, p 51

<sup>33</sup> QFCC Annual Report, pp 51-53.

<sup>34</sup> QFCC Annual Report, pp 49-50.

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- sponsoring two Young Achiever Awards
  - conducting surveys of the child protection, youth justice and family support workforces as well as the broader Queensland community.<sup>35</sup>

#### **2.2.4. Supporting, connecting and collaborating with other organisations**

To achieve its fourth objective in 2023-24, the QFCC undertook a range of activities including:

- leading the First Nations Queensland Consultative Body engagement and consultation project, commissioned by the Department of Education
- continuing the Thriving Queensland Kids Partnership
- hosting a series of Child Rights dialogues and funding research on the framing of child rights
- working with numerous stakeholders and advisory groups to improve reporting systems and advocate for child death prevention activities
- using data from the Child Death Register to inform the development and strengthening of Australian product standards and regulations
- providing leadership and expert advice to various state and national committees and advisory groups
- providing financial support to a variety of scholarships and prizes.<sup>36</sup>

#### **2.2.5. Building QFCC's capacity, capability and culture**

As of 30 June 2024, the QFCC's workforce comprised 65.68 full time equivalent staff with a total staff headcount of 80. Total employee expenses for 2023-24 was \$9.5 million.<sup>37</sup>

In 2023-24, the QFCC maintained several external and internal governance bodies to provide direction and structured decision-making channels for its performance. This included the QFCC Advisory Council, the QFCC Youth Advisory Council, the lived experience expert panel, and the Audit and Risk Management Committee.<sup>38</sup>

### **2.3. Performance of Queensland's child protection system**

The QFCC is required to report<sup>39</sup> on:

- the performance of Queensland's child protection system in achieving state and national goals
- Queensland's child protection system's performance over time in comparison to other jurisdictions

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<sup>35</sup> QFCC Annual Report, pp 55-59.

<sup>36</sup> QFCC Annual Report, pp 60-67.

<sup>37</sup> QFCC Annual Report, p 78.

<sup>38</sup> QFCC Annual Report, p 86-88.

<sup>39</sup> FCC Act, s 40.

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- Queensland's progress in reducing the number of, and improving the outcomes for, Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children and young people in the child protection system.<sup>40</sup>

To meet this obligation, the report assessed Queensland's performance across 2023-24 against a variety of state and national goals and indicators, aligned to five common goals. These common goals were:

1. The Queensland child protection and family support system supports families earlier.
2. There are sufficient resources to provide quality support services to Queensland children and families when needed.
3. Queensland's out of home care and Youth Justice systems are upholding the rights of the children and young people they serve.
4. Queensland's out of home care and youth justice systems are meeting the needs and upholding the rights of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children, families, and communities.
5. The Queensland child protection and family support system is a collaborative and accountable system.<sup>41</sup>

Key points noted by the report in respect of each of these goals are set out below.

### **2.3.1. Supporting families earlier**

- Over the last three years, expenditure on family services has increased. However, the per-child spend in Queensland (\$8,333) still lags behind Victoria (\$15,440) and New South Wales (\$13,610) and the rate of children entering child protection remains unchanged.
- In 2022-23, Queensland had the third-highest rate of children in child protection services (34.4 per 1000).
- More Queensland children have been found to have been harmed or at risk of harm with a 12.1 per cent increase in substantiated child protection investigations between 2018-19 and the 12 months to 31 March 2024.<sup>42</sup>

### **2.3.2. Sufficient resources to provide quality support services**

- In 2022-2023, Queensland had the highest spending of any jurisdiction on youth justice services.
- While overall, funding for youth justice services in Queensland has increased by 26.7 per cent, the majority of the increase has funded detention-based services.

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<sup>40</sup> QFCC Annual Report, p 92.

<sup>41</sup> QFCC Annual Report, p 92.

<sup>42</sup> QFCC Annual Report, pp 94-99.

- Over the past 5 years, there has been an increase in child concern reports (9.4 per cent) and a sharp increase in notifications (34.5 per cent).
- The number of carer families is not increasing at the rate of demand and is causing more Queensland children to be raised in residential care.<sup>43</sup>

### **2.3.3. Upholding the rights of the children and young people in out of home care and detention**

#### *Out of home care*

- Queensland children and young people in out of home care experience more placements than children in many other states.
- Most children and young people living in out of home care reported they feel cared for, safe and secure and happy.
- For the 12 months ending 31 March 2024, 238 Queensland children and young people in out of home care were the subject of substantiated harm reports, an increase of 41 cases or 20.8 per cent from the 12 months ending 31 March 2023.

#### *Youth justice system*

- Queensland detains more children than any other state, has the highest rates of unsentenced detention and Queensland children spent the most nights in custody.
- Over the past 5 years, there has been an increase in the number and rate of children and young people subject to youth justice custody, and a decrease in community-based supervision.
- In Queensland, more children and young people are being held in watch houses for longer periods.
- There has been a reduction in self-harm and suicide attempts not requiring hospitalisation among young people (especially in relation to non-Indigenous youth) in custody in Queensland in 2022-23 when compared with 2021-2022.
- The Queensland model of youth justice is not effectively rehabilitating offenders.<sup>44</sup>

### **2.3.4. Meeting the needs and upholding the rights of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children, families, and communities**

- First Nations children, young people and families continue to be disproportionately represented in statutory child protection and youth justice systems in Queensland and across Australia.
- In Queensland, there were significantly more Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children and young people in out of home care than would be expected given the proportion of First Nations children and young people in the state's population.

<sup>43</sup> QFCC Annual Report, pp 102-114.

<sup>44</sup> QFCC Annual Report, pp 115-133.



- When Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children and young people are reunified with their families, it is almost always successful. While the numbers of reunifications are low, it has been gradually increasing over time.
- The annual rate of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander infant deaths has been decreasing. However, the infant mortality rate in 2022-23 in Queensland remains significantly higher for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander infants than non-Indigenous infants.<sup>45</sup>

### 2.3.5. A collaborative and accountable system

- Queensland has a strong child and family support sector with many organisations operating to prioritise the safety and wellbeing of Queensland children and their families.
- There is increasing transparency about the performance of Queensland's youth justice and child protection systems.
- In the QFCC's 2024 Community Survey, respondents were divided about whether 'young people have the opportunity to contribute to discussions about issues that affect them'.
- Some weaknesses in this area are common across Australia's child protection and youth justice systems.<sup>46</sup>

## 3. Child Death Review Board Annual Report 2023-24

The QFCC hosts the CDRB, with the QFCC's Principal Commissioner acting as Chair. The CDRB tabled its annual report for 2023-24 on 10 February 2025 (CDRB Annual Report).

Key reportable outcomes for 2023-24 include:

- The CDRB reviewed more cases than it received, reducing the backlog of cases.<sup>47</sup> As at 30 June 2024, 65 cases were awaiting review by the CDRB.<sup>48</sup>
- The CDRB reviewed 70 cases – 61 per cent non-Indigenous (14 female and 29 male) and 39 per cent Indigenous (9 female and 18 male).<sup>49</sup>
- 41 per cent of cases reviewed involved deaths caused by natural causes while 59 per cent involved deaths due to 'external causes'. The largest 'external cause' was transport related deaths.<sup>50</sup>
- Domestic and family violence were present in 56 per cent of cases examined.<sup>51</sup>

<sup>45</sup> QFCC Annual Report, pp 134-143.

<sup>46</sup> QFCC Annual Report, pp 144-149.

<sup>47</sup> Child Death Review Board, *Annual Report 2023-24* (CDRB Annual Report), p 14.

<sup>48</sup> CDRB Annual Report, p 14.

<sup>49</sup> CDRB Annual Report, p 16.

<sup>50</sup> CDRB Annual Report, p 17.

<sup>51</sup> CDRB Annual Report, p 18.



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- Suicide is the leading cause of death for Queensland children aged 10 to 17 years.<sup>52</sup> Of the cases the CDRB reviewed in 2023–24, six children died by suicide.<sup>53</sup>
  - The cohorts of children at greatest risk of mental ill-health are children and young people who have experienced child maltreatment, children experiencing sexual abuse, Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander young people and gender diverse young people.<sup>54</sup>
  - A large proportion of children who died due to natural causes reviewed by the CDRB in 2023-24 also had chronic medical conditions and disabilities.<sup>55</sup>
  - Several cases reviewed by the CDRB noted parental substance abuse was a significant factor in the child's household (which increases risk of child maltreatment).<sup>56</sup>

### **3.1.1. Monitoring of progress of 2022-23 recommendations**

The CDRB Annual Report contained an update on the implementation of recommendations in its annual report for the previous financial year (2022-23).<sup>57</sup> It stated:

- Three recommendations made to the Queensland Government as a whole were closed or complete, while one, relating to youth justice, was still in progress.
- One recommendation made to the Department of Education, relating to home schooling, was still in progress.
- One recommendation made to the Department of Youth Justice, Employment, Small Business and Training, relating to youth detention centres, was still in progress.

### **3.1.2. New recommendations**

The CDRB Annual Report made nine recommendations, several of which were multi-faceted, including:

- One recommendation to the Department of Premier and Cabinet, relating to the publication of commitments made by Ministers.
- One recommendation to the Department of Child Safety, Seniors and Disability Services and Queensland Health, regarding the development of new practice guidance on children's sexual health and wellbeing.
- Three recommendations to the Queensland Government, regarding its response to a previous recommendation on continuity of care for children with complex

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<sup>52</sup> CDRB Annual Report, p 46.

<sup>53</sup> CDRB Annual Report, p 46.

<sup>54</sup> CDRB Annual Report, p 50.

<sup>55</sup> CDRB Annual Report, p 70.

<sup>56</sup> CDRB Annual Report, p 120.

<sup>57</sup> CDRB Annual Report, pp 124-134.

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needs, its response to family and domestic violence, and work to embed the practice guidance relating to parental substance and methamphetamine use.

- Three recommendations to Queensland Health, relating to the provision of mental health services to children, the provision of improved guidance to assess the safety of children living with disabilities and/or chronic medical conditions, and the development of guidelines to promote a family-centred approach to the provision of health services to children.
- One recommendation to the Queensland Government, the Department of Child Safety, Seniors and Disability Services, Queensland Health, the Department of Education, Queensland Police Service, and the Department of Youth Justice and Victim Support regarding a public campaign on child development, parenting and corporal punishment, and improving staff awareness of the vulnerabilities of non-verbal children.<sup>58</sup>

#### 4. Oversight hearing

The committee conducted an oversight hearing with the QFCC in Brisbane on 13 March 2025. At that hearing, QFCC provided evidence on a range of issues, the most notable of which are discussed below.

##### 4.1. Key achievements in 2023-24

Luke Twyford advised the committee about the QFCC's key achievements in 2023-24:

*Our latest annual report reflects a significant and productive year, and the commission has grown our reputation for evidence based oversight...The impact of the commission's work is apparent in current government reforms and initiatives including post-detention release support, secure care facilities, dual care and models in residential care, professionalised foster care pilots, funding for re-engagement schools in the youth justice portfolio, health home visiting program, transparent reporting on the number of children in watch houses, the review of the regulation of home education, investment in youth foyers and many more.*<sup>59</sup>

Mr Twyford continued, emphasising the value of reviews by the QFCC in 2023-24:

*Our work in reviewing the child protection and youth justice system is well regarded. We have produced detailed and significant reviews in the last year including on children absent from care; the crossover cohort; exiting youth detention; raised by a checklist; the voices of children in residential care, who is responsible—the reason why Queensland children spend longer in watch houses; growing up in Queensland; risks for children when parents use methamphetamine; paediatric sepsis mortality study; care allowances and the future of foster care; and parenting as a young person.*<sup>60</sup>

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<sup>58</sup> CDRB Annual Report, pp 9-11.

<sup>59</sup> Public hearing transcript, Brisbane, 13 March 2025, p 1.

<sup>60</sup> Public hearing transcript, Brisbane, 13 March 2025, pp 1-2.

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The Principal Commissioner also identified the maintenance and analysis of the Child Death Register, and the work of the CDRB, as important aspects of the QFCC's work in 2023-24.<sup>61</sup>

#### **4.2. Significant changes to role and size of the QFCC**

The QFCC shared with the committee that significant changes to the role and size of QFCC are anticipated in 2025 following the implementation of the *Child Safe Organisations Act 2024*. The QFCC stated that as a result of the Act:

- the scope of its responsibilities has significantly expanded
- its annual budget has increased from \$12 million to \$23 million
- staffing has grown from 50 to 80 full time equivalent positions, with further recruitment expected to occur by the end of the year.<sup>62</sup>

Luke Twyford described 2025 as a 'defining moment' for the QFCC and explained:

*The commission is currently evolving from an oversight body of government to a leader in community-based system reform, ensuring that child safety and child safeguarding is a lived reality across Queensland. To manage this transformation effectively, I am continuing to strengthen the commission's internal governance, improving our financial management and embedding a collaborative evidence-based approach in every aspect of our work.*<sup>63</sup>

#### **4.3. Review of, and reforms to, the Blue Card scheme**

In response to committee questions about changes to Blue Card requirements for kinship carers, the QFCC advised the committee that it anticipates that up to 200 Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children could be moved from residential care to safe placements within their families as a result of these changes.<sup>64</sup> However, the QFCC stressed that such placements would still be subject to a variety of safeguards to ensure that children are placed with appropriate carers.<sup>65</sup> The QFCC also noted that these changes are not yet in force as a commencement date for the relevant legislation has not been set.<sup>66</sup>

In response to questions about recent and current reviews of the Blue Card system, the QFCC advised the committee that:

- there are currently 16 outstanding recommendations from the 2017 review of the Blue Card scheme, though there have also been 'some pretty significant and profound amendments' to that scheme since it was undertaken<sup>67</sup>
- the current review into the Blue Card scheme has not yet made any findings.<sup>68</sup>

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<sup>61</sup> Public hearing transcript, Brisbane, 13 March 2025, p 2.

<sup>62</sup> Public hearing transcript, Brisbane, 13 March 2025, p 2.

<sup>63</sup> Public hearing transcript, Brisbane, 13 March 2025, p 2.

<sup>64</sup> Public hearing transcript, Brisbane, 13 March 2025, p 3.

<sup>65</sup> Public hearing transcript, Brisbane, 13 March 2025, p 5.

<sup>66</sup> Public hearing transcript, Brisbane, 13 March 2025, p 5.

<sup>67</sup> Luke Twyford, Principal Commissioner, QFCC, public hearing transcript, Brisbane, 13 March 2025, p 3.

<sup>68</sup> Public hearing transcript, Brisbane, 13 March 2025, p 4.

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The QFCC told the committee that while the Blue Card scheme is important, there has been a historic overreliance on the scheme within Queensland's child safety system.<sup>69</sup> The Principal Commissioner explained that, in addition to the scheme, keeping children safe requires more, including:

*Child safeguarding policies, appropriate risk management plans, recruitment processes that actually ask questions about a person's history and behaviours and code of conduct matters, [and] appropriate training across our communities so that all Queenslanders are aware of what grooming behaviour looks like, what unsafe child practices look like...*<sup>70</sup>

#### **4.4. Impact of detention on the mental health of children**

The committee sought advice from the QFCC regarding progress in protecting the mental health of children, in particular those children detained in youth detention centres and police watch houses. The QFCC advised that it anticipates that several recent government initiatives and announcements will contribute to positive change in this area. However, the QFCC expressed the view that a number of children detained in police watch houses, and the length of time for which they are detained, remains of significant concern.<sup>71</sup>

#### **4.5. QFCC view on Making Queensland Safer laws**

The committee sought the QFCC's view on the *Making Queensland Safer Act 2024*, and related legislation. The QFCC stated that it remained concerned about 'an overreliance on punitive responses' to youth crime.<sup>72</sup> The Principal Commissioner advocated for a more strategic, 'whole of system' approach to youth justice that emphasises rehabilitation rather than punitive outcomes.<sup>73</sup>

#### **4.6. Child safeguarding education**

The committee requested additional information from the QFCC regarding support for child safeguarding education, including the production of the *Pocket Guide to Sexual Abuse: How to help a friend*. The QFCC shared that the uptake of that publication had exceeded expectations and provided information about additional programs in this area.<sup>74</sup>

#### **4.7. First Nations and Child Rights Advocacy team**

The committee sought information from the QFCC regarding administrative and funding arrangements for the First Nations and Child Rights Advocacy team. The QFCC noted that existing funding for this team will expire on 30 June, with ongoing funding forming part of a budget proposal that is currently under consideration.<sup>75</sup>

The QFCC emphasised the value of the work conducted by this team. Natalie Lewis, the Commissioner who leads the team, explained that its focus is 'primarily and

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<sup>69</sup> Public hearing transcript, Brisbane, 13 March 2025, p 4

<sup>70</sup> Luke Twyford, Principal Commissioner, QFCC, public hearing transcript, Brisbane, 13 March 2025, p 4.

<sup>71</sup> Public hearing transcript, Brisbane, 13 March 2025, pp 5-6.

<sup>72</sup> Natalie Lewis, Commissioner, QFCC, public hearing transcript, Brisbane, 13 March 2025, p 7.

<sup>73</sup> Luke Twyford, Principal Commissioner, QFCC, public hearing transcript, Brisbane, 13 March 2025, pp 7-8.

<sup>74</sup> Public hearing transcript, Brisbane, 13 March 2025, p 8.

<sup>75</sup> Public hearing transcript, Brisbane, 13 March 2025, pp 2 and 9.

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unapologetically on First Nations children,'<sup>76</sup> and that it 'provides a unique value proposition based on our mandate, our knowledge of lived and living experience, and systems insights.'<sup>77</sup>

### Committee comment



The committee commends the Queensland Family and Child Commission for its work in the 2023-24 financial year.

The QFCC plays an essential role in keeping Queensland's children safe and in providing oversight of the child protection and youth justice systems. This is also true of the First Nations and Child Rights Advocacy team, which works to ensure both those systems respond effectively to the needs of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children in Queensland.

The committee notes the importance of the QFCC's role in maintaining the Child Death Register and hosting the Child Death Review Board.

The committee acknowledges that significant changes are underway with respect to both the size of the QFCC and the scope of its functions. The committee will examine the implementation and impact of these changes in more detail as it continues its oversight of the QFCC.



### Recommendation 1

That the committee recommends that the House notes the contents of this report.

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<sup>76</sup> Public hearing transcript, Brisbane, 13 March 2025, p 2.

<sup>77</sup> Public hearing transcript, Brisbane, 13 March 2025, p 3.

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## Appendix A – Public Hearing, 13 March 2025

### Queensland Family and Child Commission

Luke Twyford          Principal Commissioner

Natalie Lewis          Commissioner