

Buncombe County Community Child Protection Team & Child Fatality Prevention Team



Protecting our Children

2021 ANNUAL REPORT TO BUNCOMBE COUNTY BOARD OF COMMISSIONERS AND HEALTH & HUMAN SERVICES BOARD Submitted 5/23/2022

I. Introduction to the North Carolina Child Fatality Prevention System

North Carolina's Child Fatality Prevention System is addressed in Article 14 of the North Carolina Juvenile Code, N.C.G.S. 7B-1400 through 7B-1414. The public policy that anchors this system is articulated in the statute as follows:

The General Assembly finds that it is the public policy of this State to prevent the abuse, neglect, and death of juveniles. The General Assembly further finds that the prevention of the abuse, neglect, and death of juveniles is a community responsibility; that professionals from disparate disciplines have responsibilities for children or juveniles and have expertise that can promote their safety and well-being; and that multidisciplinary reviews of the abuse, neglect, and death of juveniles can lead to a greater understanding of the causes and methods of preventing these deaths.

According to Article 14, the purpose of the system is to assess the records of all deaths of children in NC from birth to age 18, as well as selected cases in which children are being served by child protective services (CPS), in order to:

- Develop a community-wide approach to child abuse and neglect;
- Understand causes of childhood deaths;
- Identify gaps or deficiencies in service delivery in public agency systems designed to prevent abuse, neglect, and death; and
- Make and implement recommendations for laws, rules, and policies that will support the safe and healthy development of children and prevent future child abuse, neglect, and death.

Every county in NC has two teams that are part of the state Child Fatality Prevention System.

1. The **Community Child Protection Team (CCPT)** reviews selected active cases of children who are being served by child protective services (CPS), and all cases in which a child died as a result of suspected or confirmed abuse or neglect and a report of abuse or neglect had been made about the child or their family to the Department of

Social Services (DSS) within the prior 12 months, or the child or their family was a recipient of CPS within the prior 12 months.

2. The **Child Fatality Prevention Team (CFPT)** reviews the records of all cases of additional child fatalities (i.e., the deaths of children who died from a cause other than suspected abuse or neglect). It is important to note that fatalities are reviewed during the calendar year following the year of death.

In most counties, including Buncombe, these two local review teams are merged into one team. Based on case reviews, the local CCPT/CFPT makes recommendations and advocates for system improvements and needed resources where gaps and deficiencies may exist.

CCPT and CFPT membership is designated by statute, consisting of various representatives of public and private community agencies that provide services to children and their families, including the local Department of Social Services (DSS), Health Department, law enforcement, Guardian Ad Litem, and school systems. The local board of county commissioners also may appoint as many as five additional members to represent agencies or the community at-large. Appendix 1 shows the mandated members and their appointing authority, as well as the specific individuals filling those roles for the Buncombe County CCPT/CFPT. I currently am working to get a new Medical Examiner appointed to our team. Our other current vacancy is that of a parent who had a child who died before their eighteenth birthday. The latter has been a difficult position to fill in the past. We will be reaching out to agencies that provide support to families following the death of a child, asking them to share information about this opportunity with the parents.

The purpose of this report is to summarize the activities and accomplishments of the Buncombe County CCPT/CFPT during the prior calendar year, including the number of child fatality reviews conducted and data on the causes of those child fatalities, the number of DSS case reviews conducted, and recommendations for system improvements and needed resources to prevent child abuse, neglect, and death.

II. Role of the Buncombe County Board of Commissioners and Health & Human Services Board

- Receive the annual report from the Buncombe County CCPT/CFPT, which contains recommendations for prevention of child abuse, neglect, and death.
- Advocate for system improvements and needed resources, if requested.
- Appoint members to the Buncombe County CCPT/CFPT as identified by team members and designated by state statute.

III. Child Maltreatment Case Reviews

In 2021, the Buncombe County CCPT/CFPT reviewed four open DSS cases of child abuse and neglect. One of the cases focused on truancy, two of the cases involved intimate partner violence, and all four involved trauma and mental health needs of

children and/or parents. These case reviews highlighted the complex struggles and decisions of families, children, DSS social workers, community agencies and the court system. Team members offered recommendations to the presenting social workers on additional resources to assist children and families.

IV. Child Fatality Reviews

The Buncombe County CCPT/CFPT reviewed 21 deaths that occurred in children who resided in Buncombe County at the time of their deaths in 2020. Please see Appendix 2 for aggregate data on the causes of reviewed child deaths in Buncombe County in 2020, as well as select demographic information about the deceased children.

During the review of the 2020 child fatalities, the team identified the following system problems and recommendations for future prevention efforts.

Cause of Death	System Problem Identified	Recommendation	Actions
Homicide	Systemic racism and other biases, along with gaps in safety net services, contribute to a lack of health, safety and opportunities for children and families.	Local governmental agencies (e.g., Buncombe County, City of Asheville, law enforcement, courts, and school systems) should require and invest in Racial Equity Institute's Groundwater training (or equivalent) for their staff.	Team Chair to share this recommendation with leaders of these agencies, including Buncombe County HHS Board, Chief Equity & Human Rights Officer, and Justice Services Director, by end of May 2022.
Sudden Unexplained Infant Death – unsafe sleep environment	Caregivers continue to place infants in unsafe sleep environments (e.g., sleep areas with soft bedding, pillows, etc.), leading to preventable infant deaths.	BCHHS and partners should review current best practice messaging on safe sleep, update local safe sleep campaign materials as appropriate, and share these materials with the community, including through trusted community messengers like community health workers & churches.	Planning for the initial meeting of the Buncombe County Safe Sleep Workgroup is underway. Invites will be sent in June 2022.
		NC Judges School should provide safe sleep education to judges who oversee custody cases & encourage judges to order safe sleep education for non-custodial parents.	Judge Ward Scott will be speaking about safe sleep to those attending the summer and fall sessions of the NC Judges School.

Suicide	Child suicide is a growing issue in the US and parents/ caregivers lack understanding of how to recognize and address suicidal thoughts in children.	Schools, Vaya & BCHHS should partner to share information on child suicide with parents (including data and resources about how to recognize suicide risk and what to do if concerns).	BCHHS, the local school systems, & Vaya collaborated on a youth suicide prevention effort focused on K-12 that involved a press release, online movie screening & a social media campaign.
	Timely access to appropriate mental health services for children is difficult, & sometimes impossible, to access.	If the parent/legal guardian permits, hospital social workers should inform school staff when students are hospitalized for mental health issues.	Recommendation was shared with Mission Hospital's Director of Clinical Operations who agreed and said they would speak about this with hospital social work supervisor.
		Consider local utilization of suicide prevention expert(s) to follow & assist with management of children with histories of hospitalization for suicidal ideation.	Recommendation was shared with leadership at Vaya who said they would work with their team to determine if possible for staff to work with schools in these situations.

V. Buncombe County CCPT/CFPT Activities and Accomplishments

- The team met nine times in 2021 and three times in 2022 to review 2020 fatalities and open DSS cases. The team met two additional times in 2021 for training and planning purposes.
- The Team Chair and Review Coordinator completed reports on each child fatality reviewed by the team and submitted these reports to the state CFPT Coordinator.
- The Team Chair completed the annual CCPT Survey and CFPT Activity Summary to NCDHHS by the dates requested.
- The team purchased and distributed 21 Pack 'n Plays with fitted sheets to Buncombe County's Nurse-Family Partnership Program and MAHEC's Project CARA for distribution to families in need of safe sleep environments for their infants.
- Ashleigh Tenney, Buncombe County Social Work Investigations Supervisor, presented the Safe & Together™ Model to the team. A goal of this model is to move child welfare systems from Domestic Violence Destructive to Domestic

Violence Proficient, supporting the survivor and holding the perpetrator accountable.

VI. Conclusion

Thank you to the members of the Buncombe County Board of Commissioners & Health and Human Services Board for this opportunity to share the work of the Buncombe County CCPT/CFPT. We appreciate your support of our efforts and your attention to our recommendations for the prevention of child abuse, neglect, and death. Please feel free to contact me should you have any questions about this report.

A handwritten signature in cursive script, reading "Jmullendore", in dark ink.

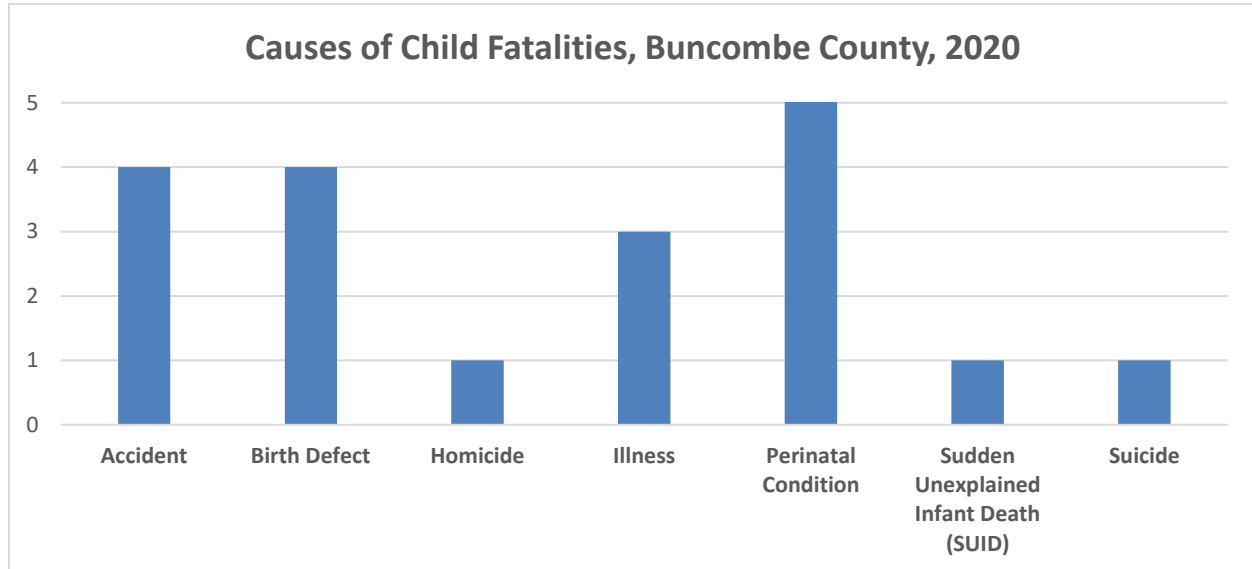
Jennifer Mullendore, MD, MSPH
Chair, Buncombe County CCPT/CFPT
Medical Director, Buncombe County Health and Human Services
Jennifer.Mullendore@buncombecounty.org

Appendix 1: Buncombe County CCPT/CFPT Membership (as of 5/19/2022)

MANDATED MEMBER	APPOINTING AUTHORITY	AGENCY	REPRESENTATIVE	MEMBER SINCE
DSS Director		Buncombe County HHS (BCHHS)	Stoney Blevins	2018
DSS staff member		BCHHS	Rebecca Smith	2019
		BCHHS	Trina Hill	2019
Local Law Enforcement Officer	Board of County Commissioners	Buncombe County Sheriff's Dept.	Sgt. Mark Walker	2022
Attorney from District Attorney's Office	District Attorney	Buncombe District Attorney's Office	Amy Broughton	2019
Executive Director of local community action agency (or their designee)		Community Action Opportunities	Trudy Logan	2016
Superintendent of each local school system (or their designee)		Asheville City Schools	April Dockery	2021
		Buncombe County Schools	Jennifer Reed	2018
County Board of Social Services member	Chair of BCHHS Board	Buncombe County HHS Board	Jacquelyn Hallum	2021
Mental Health Professional	Vaya Health LME/MCO Director	Vaya Health	Mark Van Tuyl	2019
Guardian ad Litem Coordinator (or their designee)		Guardian ad Litem – District 28	Coby Wellshear	2019
Director of local Department of Public Health		Buncombe County HHS	Stacie Saunders	2020
Local Health Care Provider	BCHHS Board	Buncombe County HHS	Dr. Jennifer Mullendore	2011
		MAHEC OB/Gyn Specialists	Dr. Elizabeth Buys	2017
Emergency Medical Services provider or firefighter	Board of County Commissioners	Buncombe County EMS	Max Boswell	2019

District Court Judge	Chief District Court Judge	Buncombe County District Court	Judge Ward Scott	2015
County Medical Examiner	Chief Medical Examiner	Buncombe County Medical Examiner	VACANT	
Representative of a Local Child Care Facility or Head Start program	Buncombe County DSS Director	Community Action Opportunities Head Start	Sharon Farmer	2015
Parent of a Child Who Died Before 18 th Birthday	Board of County Commissioners	n/a	VACANT	
Additional member #1	Board of County Commissioners	Children's Developmental Services Agency	Molly Payne	2005
Additional member #2	Board of County Commissioners	Mountain Child Advocacy Center	Geoff Sidoli	2015
Additional member #3	Board of County Commissioners	Community Care of NC (CCNC)	Sherry Noto	2018
Additional member #4	Board of County Commissioners	MAHEC Ob/Gyn Specialists, Project CARA	Tammy Cody	2018
Additional member #5	Board of County Commissioners	Helpmate	Chanel Young	2022
Review Coordinator	Buncombe County DSS Director and Health Director	BCHHS	Deana Shetley	2020

Appendix 2: 2020 Buncombe County Child Fatality Data (from Buncombe County CFPT)



- 21 fatalities total, including 16 infants
- Accidents: 1 firearm, 1 drowning, 2 suffocation & strangulation in bed
- All fatalities by race/ethnicity:
 - 3 Black/Non-Hispanic
 - 1 White/Hispanic
 - 17 White/Non-Hispanic
- All fatalities by gender:
 - 8 females
 - 13 males
- Infant fatalities by race/ethnicity:
 - 2 Black/Non-Hispanic
 - 1 White/Hispanic
 - 13 White/Non-Hispanic
- Infant fatalities by gender:
 - 7 females
 - 9 males

