

CECANF Works Toward Development of a National Strategy

The [Commission to Eliminate Child Abuse and Neglect Fatalities](#) (CECANF), established by the Protect Our Kids Act of 2012 (H.R. 6655 [112th]), is more than a year into its mission to study the current landscape and develop a national strategy and recommendations for reducing fatalities resulting from child abuse and neglect. The legislation mandates that CECANF submit a report to the President and Congress within 2 years (with a potential 1-year extension on the deadline). As part of its mandate to study the issue, CECANF hosted public meetings in San Antonio, TX; Tampa, FL; Detroit, MI; Denver, CO; Burlington, VT; Philadelphia, PA; Portland, OR; Scottsdale, AZ; and Memphis, TN, as well as a research roundtable in Philadelphia, PA, to learn more about State, local, and Tribal strategies and programs—across multiple social service systems—that have been effective in reducing maltreatment fatalities to children both known and not known to child protective services.

JooYeun Chang, Associate Commissioner of the Children's Bureau, was a presenter at the CECANF's Portland, OR, meeting. She made some suggestions for the Commissioners' forthcoming policy recommendations, including improving State definitions and data collection around near fatalities and encouraging more cross-system efforts across Federal agencies. Ms. Chang also discussed a number of provisions of the President's FY 2016 budget proposal for child welfare, which seeks to strengthen and make targeted investments in child welfare programs. Find more information on Ms. Chang's presentation at https://eliminatechildabusefatalities.sites.usa.gov/files/2014/12/OR_Slides_Panel3_2.26.15.pdf (1 MB).

According to CECANF Chairman Dr. David Sanders, "Commissioner Chang's feedback and recommendations reflect our observations on the complexity of this issue and are aligned with our current thinking around broadening the issue beyond child welfare with a stronger multidisciplinary approach."

"Preventing child abuse and neglect broadly, and child abuse and neglect fatalities specifically, requires a commitment from all of us," commented Commissioner Wade Horn, a director with Deloitte Consulting LLP and a former assistant secretary for the Administration for Children and Families at the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services. "Whether you are a Child Protective Services caseworker, a physician, a teacher or a neighbor, we all have a shared responsibility to provide support for families and children in need and to help educate every parent and adult who comes into contact with children how to keep children safe."

"As we prepare to recognize Foster Care month in May, CECANF has the opportunity to focus on a group we owe our best efforts to support—vulnerable youth in foster care transitioning to adulthood—who research tells us will nearly all soon be parents themselves," noted Commissioner Jennifer Rodriguez, executive director of the Youth Law Center and a foster care alumna. "Strengthening the support net available to this group of young parents provides us a tremendous chance to impact two generations of children we have a responsibility to protect from abuse and neglect."

Some key CECANF observations to date include:

- There are deficiencies in the counting of child abuse and neglect fatalities, which confirm earlier Government Accountability Office findings.
- The research on risk and protective factors is critically important, and there appears to be a lack of alignment between research, practice, and policy. The issue is complex, as there is no direct causal link between any one risk factor and child abuse and neglect fatalities.
- There is a strong case for the importance of information sharing, particularly among agencies tasked with better understanding risk and identifying prevention and intervention strategies. The issue of confidentiality laws, policies, and practices that facilitate or hinder system improvements cannot be overlooked.
- Questions remain about prioritization of prevention and support services and the allocation of Federal funding to support a national strategy.

- Better understanding near fatalities may be helpful for efforts to better prevent child abuse and neglect fatalities. They are similar in many characteristics, but near fatalities occur in larger numbers.
- There are questions around workforce issues, including workload and training, that may impact the problem.
- CECANF has seen a few State, jurisdiction, and community-based strategies, but has not seen any overarching strategies for eliminating child abuse and neglect fatalities. There is very little in terms of evidence-based practices, and the low incidence of fatalities presents challenges to identifying evidence-based practices.

Additional meetings are planned for the remainder of 2015 in Utah, Wisconsin, and New York. Individuals are invited to share recommendations and feedback with CECANF via the website. For more information on CECANF's work and information gathered during its public meetings, or to leave comments, go to <http://eliminatechildabusefatalities.sites.usa.gov>.