

Buncombe County
Community Child Protection Team & Child Fatality Prevention Team



Protecting our Children

**2022 ANNUAL REPORT TO BUNCOMBE COUNTY
BOARD OF COMMISSIONERS AND HEALTH & HUMAN SERVICES BOARD
Submitted 5/31/2023**

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.

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 2022, the Buncombe County CCPT/CFPT reviewed a CPS investigation that was conducted for another county due to a conflict-of-interest situation. The situation involved child maltreatment and neglect, and the investigation highlighted some challenges when counties need to collaborate on investigations. Team members offered recommendations to Buncombe County DSS representatives on how to improve collaboration between counties in this type of investigation.

Team members Sgt. Caleb Hunter and Tammy Cody participated in a state-led intensive review of a fatality of a child whose family was a recipient of CPS within the 12 months prior to their death.

IV. Child Fatality Reviews

The Buncombe County CCPT/CFPT reviewed 20 deaths that occurred in children who resided in Buncombe County at the time of their deaths in 2021. Please see Appendix 2 for aggregate data on the causes of reviewed child deaths in Buncombe County in 2021, as well as select demographic information about the deceased children.

During the review of the 2021 child fatalities, the team identified the following two main system problems, made recommendations to address those problems, and took action.

Cause of Death	System Problem Identified	Recommendation	Actions
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.	A local Safe Sleep Workgroup should reconvene to work on identifying promising practices related to community messaging about safe sleep, updating prior safe sleep campaign materials, and push these materials and messages out to the community, including through trusted community messengers (community health workers, childcare facilities, churches, etc.) and agencies/programs that interact with caregivers.	The Team Chair attended a session with colleagues across the state at the NC Child Fatality Prevention Summit and learned how other counties have promoted safe sleep in their communities. The Team Chair will work with other team members to reconvene a local Safe Sleep Workgroup to review this information, along with that of other resources (Safe Sleep NC, National Institute for Children’s Health Quality, etc.), and update a local safe sleep campaign.
Suicide	Youth suicide is a growing issue in the US and parents/ caregivers lack understanding of how to recognize and address suicidal thoughts in youth.	Local K-12 schools, Vaya Health, & BCHHS should collaborate on a public awareness campaign about youth suicide, sharing information with parents & caregivers on how to identify the risks of suicide and how to	The team sponsored a Youth Suicide Prevention Community Conversation event on May 17, 2023, which pulled together representatives from a variety of community agencies that serve youth. State and local data on youth mental health & suicide were

		respond to youth who have suicidal thoughts.	shared with attendees who then generated ideas for community education & training opportunities and prevention, intervention, & postvention efforts. These ideas will be shared with the team at the June meeting and action steps developed.
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V. Buncombe County CCPT/CFPT Activities and Accomplishments

- The full team met ten times in 2022 and an additional two times in 2023 to complete 2021 fatality reviews. A subcommittee of the team also met once in 2022 to review 2021 fatalities.
- The team used their FY23 state funding to purchase 111 medication lockboxes for MAHEC’s Project CARA to distribute to their clients.
- The team facilitated a Safe Sleep NC training in July 2022 on the updated American Academy of Pediatrics safe sleep recommendations and how to have meaningful conversations with parents to address any concerns or barriers they may have about the recommendations. Attendees included representatives from BCHHS, Mission Hospital, Sistas Caring 4 Sistas, Homegrown Families, and the Children’s Developmental Services Agency. This led to additional trainings for all BCHHS Social Work staff and Mission Hospital-affiliated pediatric and obstetric healthcare providers. Safe Sleep NC staff also were connected to Mary Benson House staff to provide safe sleep materials.
- Matthew Harter with Buncombe County Social Work spoke to the team about “Choose to Change”, an intervention to help men who have engaged in violence recognize how their behavior is unsafe for their child(ren) and develop a support network to interrupt their violence and increase safety for their family.
- Nickey Stamey, Program Director at Blue Ridge Healthy Families (BRHF), spoke to the team about the free, voluntary, comprehensive home visitation programs that BRHF provides for families who are pregnant or have recently delivered a baby with the goal of mitigating child maltreatment risk. BRHF started serving Buncombe County families in 2023.
- Prior recommendations from the team that advocated for addressing community violence provided support to the Buncombe County Justice Services Department’s successful request for County Fiscal Recovery and US Department of Justice funds that are being used to implement a Community-Based Public Health Response to Violence.

- The Team Chair and Review Coordinator completed the required 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.
- Team members participated in statewide trainings about the NC Child Fatality Prevention System and various causes of child fatalities.

VI. Conclusion

Several individuals transitioned off our team this past year. Thank you to former Assistant District Attorney Amy Broughton, Buncombe County Schools Assistant Superintendent Dr. Jennifer Reed, and former Buncombe County Health Director Stacie Saunders for their years of service to our team and Buncombe County children and families.

Thank you also 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.



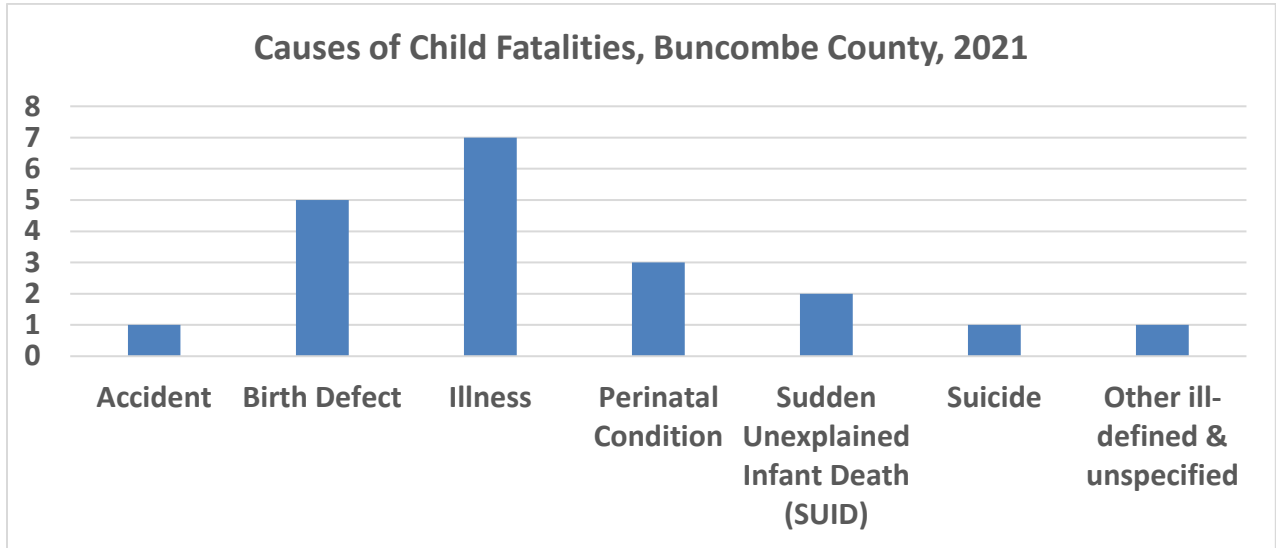
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Medical Director, Buncombe County Health and Human Services
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Appendix 1: Buncombe County CCPT/CFPT Membership (as of 05/31/2023)

MANDATED MEMBER	APPOINTING AUTHORITY	AGENCY	REPRESENTATIVE	MEMBER SINCE
DSS Director		Buncombe County HHS (BCHHS)	Stoney Blevins	2018
DSS staff member		BCHHS	Rebecca Smith	2019
			Trina Hill	2019
Local Law Enforcement Officer	Board of County Commissioners	Buncombe County Sheriff's Dept.	Sgt. Caleb Hunter	2022
Attorney from District Attorney's Office	District Attorney	Buncombe District Attorney's Office	David Denninger	2023
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	Shanon Martin	2023
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	Dr. Ellis Matheson	2023
Local Health Care Provider	BCHHS Board	Buncombe County HHS	Dr. Jennifer Mullendore	2011
		MAHEC OB/GYN Specialists	Dr. Elizabeth Buys	2017
		Mission Children's Specialists	Dr. Deana Lashley	2023
Emergency Medical Services provider or firefighter	Board of County Commissioners	Buncombe County EMS	Max Boswell	2019

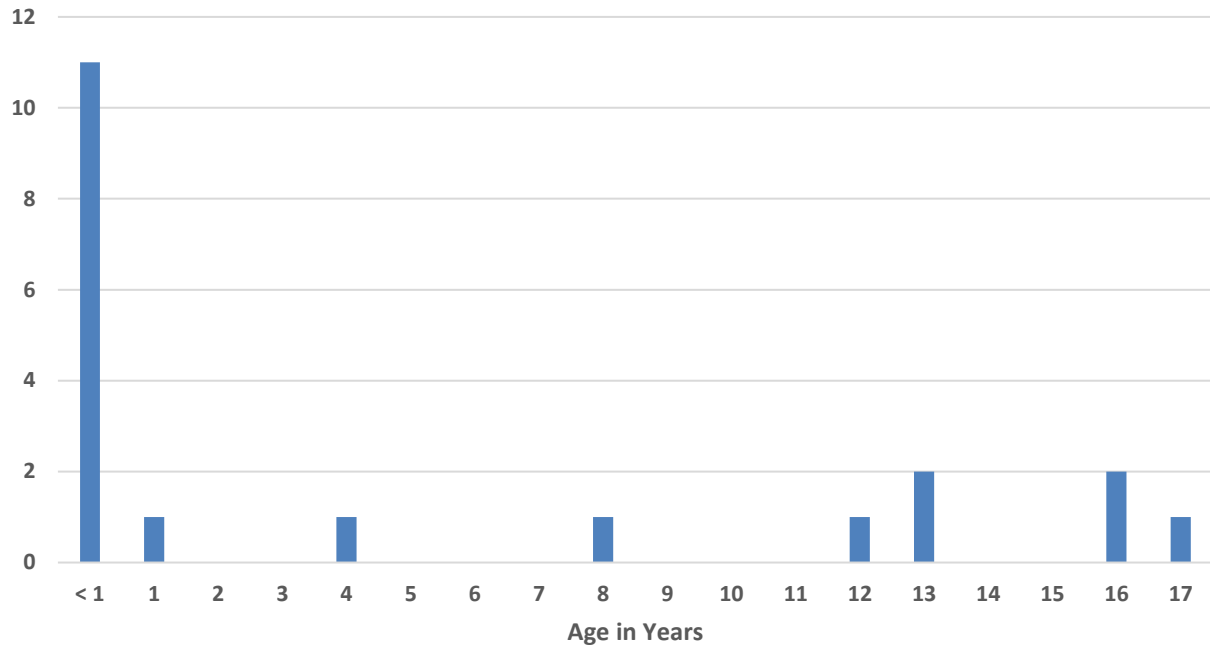
District Court Judge	Chief District Court Judge	Buncombe County District Court	Judge Ward Scott	2015
County Medical Examiner	Chief Medical Examiner	Buncombe County Medical Examiner	Paula Case	2022
Representative of a Local Child Care Facility or Head Start program	Buncombe County DSS Director	Community 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		Mountain Child Advocacy Center	Geoff Sidoli	2015
Additional member #3		Community Care of NC (CCNC)	Sherry Noto	2018
Additional member #4		MAHEC OB/GYN Specialists, Project CARA	Tammy Cody	2018
Additional member #5		Helpmate	Chanel Young	2022
Review Coordinator	Buncombe County DSS Director and Health Director	BCHHS	Deana Shetley	2020

Appendix 2: 2021 Buncombe County Child Fatality Data (from Buncombe County CFPT)



- 20 fatalities total, including 11 infants
- The fatality caused by an accident was due to choking.
- The fatalities due to perinatal conditions included one due to placental abruption and two due to preterm deliveries.
- Both Sudden Unexplained Infant Deaths were categorized as undetermined cause but involved unsafe sleep environments.
- All fatalities by race/ethnicity:
 - 6 Black/Non-Hispanic
 - 13 White/Non-Hispanic
 - 1 Other/Non-Hispanic
- All fatalities by gender:
 - 7 females
 - 13 males
- Infant fatalities by race/ethnicity:
 - 4 Black/Non-Hispanic
 - 6 White/Non-Hispanic
 - 1 Other/Non-Hispanic
- Infant fatalities by gender:
 - 3 females
 - 8 males

Ages of Child Fatalities, Buncombe County, 2021



Causes of Infant Mortality, Buncombe County, 2021

