

Media Release

The Hon Mary-Anne Thomas MP
Leader of the House
Minister for Health
Minister for Health Infrastructure
Minister for Medical Research



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GIVING CHILDREN A VOICE FOR SAFER HOSPITAL CARE

The Victorian Government will introduce a new system to support young hospital patients and their carers to easily raise their concerns with health workers if they notice worrying changes in their child's condition.

Minister for Health Mary-Anne Thomas today announced *Safer Care for Kids*, a new family-led project from Safer Care Victoria (SCV) to improve outcomes for children in emergency care.

Since the Government established SCV in 2017, its annual Sentinel Events Report has shared investigations and outcomes from tragic events in hospitals, providing recommendations to prevent similar events from ever happening again.

Every year, hundreds of thousands of children present to Victorian hospitals – and while the majority receive the best of care, SCV's work highlights rare instances where this is not the case.

This year's report showed an increase in notified sentinel events related to patient deterioration, particularly among children – and the report provides three key recommendations into the care of children, which the Government will deliver in full.

The report highlighted deterioration as the most significant factor contributing to paediatric sentinel events, and the recommendations will support clinicians to better recognise and respond to patient deterioration.

The new escalation system will be designed in close consultation with health services, and follows the successful implementation of similar processes in other jurisdictions.

We know that parents know their children best and the escalation system will be available across the state, giving parents and carers an alternative pathway to raise concerns, if they feel they are not being listened to.

A virtual paediatric consultation system will also be introduced, which will provide 24-hour access to specialist paediatric experts and services. This will be particularly beneficial to smaller regional health services when treating acutely unwell children.

The third change will be the mandated use of standardised and age-specific charts whenever a child's vital signs are recorded. The standardised charts, known as the Victorian Children's Tool for Observation and Response (ViCTOR), are already used in many Victorian health services to recognise and respond to clinical deterioration in children.

Safer Care for Kids will be implemented in partnership with families who have lived experience of sentinel events involving children, and in close consultation with health services across Victoria.

This year's Sentinel Events Report documented the total number of annual sentinel events have risen to 240 in 2021-22, up from 168 the previous year.

This was an expected increase in line with the growth of reported sentinel events since SCV was established in 2017 – which led to an improvement in reporting and a growing culture of transparency on safety risk issues and a willingness to learn from patient harm.

Quotes attributable to Minister for Health Mary-Anne Thomas

"Every sentinel event is a tragedy. We will learn from each and every event to honour the children affected, and to ensure that it does not happen again – that's why we're making these important changes."

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“We will implement the three key recommendations to make sure all Victorian children receive the best possible care.”

“Families who have lost their children because of a paediatric sentinel event have driven the launch of Safer Care for Kids and will be critical to its success – we thank them for their tireless and passionate advocacy.”