
Kidsafe Victoria White Paper

October 2022



Context

The past two years have been socially and economically unprecedented in modern Australia. COVID-19 has heightened the community's awareness and commitment to protecting personal, family and community safety. However, in parallel, there have been concerning high numbers of children impacted by unexpected incidents causing injury or death.

Injuries and accidents affecting children present significant pain, trauma and ongoing effects for children, their families, carers, and broader communities – not to mention creating an avoidable and significant drain upon the health care system at a time we can least afford this. In its worst-case scenario, the preventable death of a child causes devastating, life-long grief for parents, siblings, other relatives and connected community members.

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Impact

Between 2017–2019, an average of 17 children died and over 100,000 children were treated in hospital **every year** for unintentional injuries. In 2020, the number of deaths rose significantly above long-term averages to 29. **In 2021, this number rose again to 31 deaths – all from preventable injury.** Causes included drowning, driveway runovers, curtain and blind cords suffocations, quad bike injuries and house fires.¹

The corresponding period also saw increases in serious preventable injuries such as childhood burns and scalds, with a **30 per cent rise in severe injury admissions** for incidents in and around homes during periods of 2020².

Children living in disadvantaged circumstances are at greater risk of injury than those who are more advantaged³, and **children in regional areas of Victoria are at four times greater risk of injury related death than children in major cities**⁴. A recent report in the Australian revealed **preventable injury as among the leading causes of the recent 100 child deaths** known to child protection over the last 2 years. This highlights the importance of integrating support systems, including providing lifesaving injury prevention information to those who need it most.

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The 'cost'

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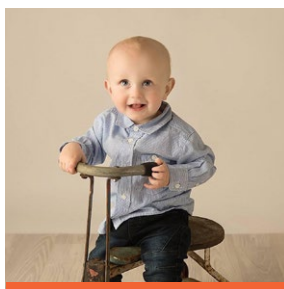
They are not just numbers. Each number is a child. These are real families, forever changed and forever impacted. They are Hunter, Ash and Matt; they are Seth, Jayde and Brendan. We invite you to meet:



Hunter

Ash and Matt, lost their 2-year-old son Hunter, when he drowned in a dam on his grandfather's farm in July 2020. "Hunter was grey, and his lips were blue and his eyes were glazed over and he was freezing. I

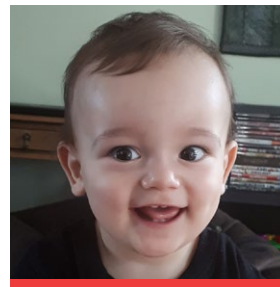
remember falling in the mud and just falling in a heap and screaming that 'he's just a little boy.' Ash, Hunter's Mum.



Seth

Jayde and Brendan, whose son Seth died in a low speed runover in 2019. 'I knew straight away something had happened. "I ran to the back of the car and saw his little red bucket under the car.

I grabbed Seth out and started doing CPR. I felt him do a little gasp, and felt him leave his body. After they took him away, I was left there, just empty. It didn't feel real. I was so numb to it all. I didn't want to believe it. It took me a couple of years to speak to anyone. Raising awareness through his legacy is the least I can do for him. Don't think it can't happen to you because I was so conscious of driveway safety and it still happened to me. And it changed my life forever. Jayde, Seth's mum.



Lincoln

Lincoln had been playing in the lounge and had liked to climb up on the windowsill and jump onto the bean bag. His Mum went for a shower and came back to find the cord around his neck.

Kerrie, Lincoln's Grandmother and her family have been forever changed by Lincoln's death. "Our lives were torn apart that day. Not only did I lose my beautiful Grandson, but part of my son died too. It's been 2 years and we all still feel completely broken and like we will never smile again." Kerrie, Lincoln's grandmother.

Beyond the trauma and the devastating impacts for families, injury also brings significant financial and economic cost. In Victoria in 2019/20, **the estimated direct costs of hospital admissions for unintentional child injury (0-14 years) was over \$65 million, up from \$46 million in 2016/17⁵**. There are also significant flow-on costs across the tertiary health system.

These trends are concerning and need urgent attention and action. A more sustainable and successful delivery model needs to be considered to arrest this trend and to provide critical support to impacted families.

The challenges

With over 80,000 babies born every year in Victoria, over 30,000 of which are to new and first-time parents and carers, it is critical that ALL families are provided with an understanding of the various dangers and armed with practical strategies and supports to create safer environments for their children.

Child injury is a multifaceted, complex health issue that falls under the purview of a wide range of organisations and agencies. This includes various government departments and agencies spanning areas including health, roads, consumer affairs, agriculture, early childhood, workplace safety emergency services. A range of non-government organisations and agencies are also involved.

Injury prevention and post-injury support tasks are provided by several organisations in Victoria. The ad hoc nature of this has led to inequitable State-wide service coverage and support. Prevention activities are not linked to post-injury rehabilitation or family support. Moreover, there are significant resource constraints for many of the interventions that evidence suggests are critical to keeping children safe, particularly in more vulnerable families, who are at greater risk of injury or death.

Service gaps are exacerbated for first-time families who, over the last 2 years, have had zero or reduced accessibility to traditional avenues of parental education and support such as MCH nurses, in-person parent groups and other in-home services. Just recently, Melton and Wyndham councils made the decision to see families with newborns only up to 8 weeks of age, due to capacity restrictions. There has been a reduction in the provision of child safety education or “hands on” first-aid training for parents, carers and family members. This is imperative as once children become mobile, they are at increased risk of injury.

The home is the most common location for child injuries, with higher injury risks to children, compared to the more regulated environments for children, such as schools and pre-schools⁶. The COVID-19 pandemic and ongoing lack of access to formalised childcare for many families has led to many families spending extended periods of time at home, thereby increasing the risk of injuries.

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The solution

While the causes may be different, the mechanisms for prevention are the same. Child injuries and deaths are preventable when parents and carers are equipped with appropriate knowledge of hazards and their mitigation.

These deaths – and the lifelong consequences of them – were all avoidable. Further deaths are avoidable. In the context of rising numbers of deaths and annual injury rates, Kidsafe Victoria believes that systemic change is needed.

Victorian children deserve an investment in their future. This can happen through coordinated sector leadership and service delivery, using a collaborative approach with key organisations and families to ensure consistent and uniform delivery of our services and messaging. We need a system which provides central coordination yet is locally delivered – because there is no one size fits all approach to different populations when it comes to any issue, and injury prevention is no exception.

Kidsafe has prepared a submission for consideration to help reverse these trends. Similar to the road toll, we need investment and a system that will enable us to aim for zero deaths – because no child death is acceptable. An investment in prevention will save children's lives, improve the emotional, mental, and physical well-being of families, and greatly reduce the financial and social impact on our community and government.

We need an investment in coordination, sector leadership and service delivery roles, via a collaborative approach with key organisations and families to ensure consistent and uniform delivery of our services and messaging.



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