

State Mortality Review Committee

2025 Annual Report

June 2026

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Introduction

Pursuant to Iowa Code §§135.43 and 135.110, the State Mortality Review Committee (SMRC) is required to publish an annual report on child deaths and a biennial report on domestic abuse deaths, respectively. The SMRC has elected to produce a single annual report that combines the findings of all subcommittees. The SMRC was established under 2024 Iowa Acts, SF2385. This edition of the annual report does not include findings or recommendations due to the eight-month duration the committee has met.

This report covers activities of the SMRC and cases and data reviewed from May 2025 through December 2025.

Because each subcommittee is responsible for a distinct volume and complexity of cases, caseloads vary across groups. Consequently, the cases under review may not align with the calendar year in which the deaths occurred. For example, a subcommittee with a more complex caseload may still be reviewing deaths from 2021, whereas another subcommittee may have progressed to reviewing deaths from 2023.

Future reports will include the following:

1. Representations of the cases and data reviewed by each subcommittee in the previous full calendar year.
2. Findings and recommendations identified by SMRC resulting from collective work of the SMRC subcommittees.
3. The 2026 annual report will incorporate the 2025 reviews completed by the SMRC between May and December 2025, along with the reviews completed in calendar year 2026.

Overview of the SMRC

The State Mortality Review Committee (SMRC), established under Iowa Code §§135.43, 135.110 and Iowa Administrative Code Chapter 641—90, reviews, analyzes, and reports on the causes and manner of deaths and from these reviews makes recommendations to reduce harm and prevent future child and domestic abuse deaths.

The SMRC has established three specialized subcommittees focused on: Child Deaths, Domestic Abuse Deaths, and Maternal Mortality. The SMRC and its subcommittees collect, review, and analyze relevant information to identify contributing factors associated with individual deaths. This information may include patient medical records, investigative and legal reports, court documents, and other pertinent data related to

child death, domestic abuse, or maternal death. Using these insights, the SMRC develops actionable recommendations to improve prevention strategies.

Maternal mortality reviews have been conducted for decades under Iowa Administrative Code 641—90. The SMRC established the Maternal Mortality subcommittee in response to the rising number of maternal deaths and develop a standardize maternal death review. The goal of standardized death reviews is to develop more robust state and national pictures of maternal health and deaths and identify prevention opportunities.

SMRC Membership

The SMRC is comprised of the following members pursuant to Iowa Code §135.43; membership terms are three years.

Membership	Appointment	Organization
The State Medical Examiner or designee	Dr. Dennis Klein	Iowa Office of the State Medical Examiner
A licensed physician knowledgeable concerning the causes of death	Dr. Stephanie Radke	University of Iowa Hospitals and Clinics
A certified or licensed professional knowledgeable regarding substance use disorder	Dr. Alison Lynch	University of Iowa Hospitals and Clinics
An attorney with experience in prosecuting domestic abuse cases	Rachel Zimmermann Smith	Johnson County Attorney
An expert in unexpected or unexplained infant deaths	Casey Manser	Iowa SIDS Foundation
A clerk of a district court	Stacey Oleson	Mitchell County Clerk of Court
A judicial officer	Judge Daniel Vakulskas	State of Iowa Judicial Branch – District 3
A local law enforcement official	Capt. Sadie Weekley	Marshalltown Police Department

A social worker knowledgeable about deaths of children

Abby Schueller, LMSW

University of Iowa Prevention Research Center

Committee and Subcommittee Reports

State Mortality Review Committee (SMRC)

SMRC was formally established in May 2025 following the adoption of Iowa Administrative Code Chapter 641—90. The SMRC convened twice in 2025: June 13, and November 3. The committee elected Rachel Zimmerman as Chair and Dr. Alison Lynch as Co-Chair and established three specialized subcommittees: the Child Death Review Subcommittee, the Domestic Abuse Death Review Subcommittee, and the Maternal Mortality Review Subcommittee at the inaugural meeting. Each subcommittee was tasked with reviewing fatalities within its scope and providing comprehensive recommendations to the full committee.

In 2025, Iowa HHS drafted protocols for child abuse assessment reviews as required under Iowa Code §135.43(4). In 2026, the committee plans to implement these protocols through a Child Abuse Assessment Subcommittee.

Child Death Review Subcommittee (CDR)

CDR supports the SMRC by reviewing fatalities of children from live birth through 17 years of age occurring within the state of Iowa and makes recommendations to prevent future deaths. The CDR includes 26 members that represent a diverse range of clinical and professional expertise, including pediatrics, neonatology, emergency medicine, forensic pathology, law enforcement, social work, mental health, public health, and child protective services. The subcommittee reviews approximately 280 cases per year.

In 2025, the CDR convened on three occasions and reviewed 213 cases involving child fatalities that occurred between 2021 and 2023. These cases included deaths resulting from unsafe sleep, motor vehicle, off-highway vehicles, farm related motor vehicle, and pedestrian versus motor vehicle incidences. Recommendations from these meetings will be reviewed by the SMRC and be included in the 2026 annual report.

Domestic Abuse Death Review Subcommittee (DADR)

DADR supports the SMRC by reviewing domestic abuse-related homicides and suicides that involve or are a result of an assault as defined in Iowa Code §708.1 and makes recommendations to prevent future deaths.

Eligible cases include situations where the parties involved were:

- Current, separated, or former spouses
- Current or former cohabiting partners
- Parents of the same minor children
- Current or former dating partners
- Individuals related by blood or affinity to someone in the same household or workplace
- Individuals subject to an order of protection between the perpetrator and victim

The DADR reviews an average of 15-20 cases per year. There are 20 members on the DADR, including professionals from fields like law enforcement, criminal justice, forensic pathology, healthcare, behavioral health, social services, victim advocacy, public health, and individuals with lived experience who provide critical insight into the dynamics of domestic abuse.

In 2025, the subcommittee convened three times. During this period, new processes and tools were implemented to improve the efficiency and depth of case reviews. These enhancements provide members with more comprehensive data prior to meetings, ensuring accurate, timely, and well-informed case evaluations. Utilizing these new processes, the DADR reviewed four cases during the year. Recommendations from these meetings will be reviewed by the SMRC and included in the 2026 annual report.

Maternal Mortality Review Subcommittee (MMR)

MMR supports the SMRC by reviewing all maternal deaths and makes recommendations to prevent future deaths. A maternal death is a death during or within one year of the end of pregnancy, regardless of the cause. There are 27 members on the MMR, representing expertise in clinical care, public health, behavioral health, emergency response, maternal-child health, and related support services, ensuring comprehensive perspectives in maternal death review.

In 2025, the subcommittee reviewed seven cases of maternal deaths that occurred in 2023. Recommendations from these meetings will be reviewed by the SMRC and included in the 2026 annual report.

Appendix A:

Subcommittee

Membership Lists

Child Death Review Subcommittee Membership List

Expertise/Specialty	Name	Organization
Substance Use Disorder	Andrew Allen	Youth Shelter Services (YSS)
Assistant Attorney General Liaison	Ryan Baldridge	Iowa Attorney General's Office
Statewide System Mental Health	Emily Blomme	Foundation 2 Crisis Services
Neonatologist	Dr. John Dagle	University of Iowa Hospitals and Clinics
Local Law Enforcement	Lisa DuFour	Tipton Police Department
Health Statistics/Vital Records	Melissa Ellis	Iowa HHS
Health Insurance Industry	Jerry Fiala	Wellmark Blue Cross Blue Shield
State Child Protective Services Director	Lori Frick	Iowa HHS
Child Care Nurse Consultant	Kim Gonzales	Iowa HHS
ED Physician, Pediatrician	Dr. Amy Groen	Unity Point Blank Children's Hospital, American Academy of Pediatrics – Iowa Chapter
Juvenile Justice	Chad Jensen	State of Iowa Judicial Branch – Juvenile Justice
County Attorney	Peter Johnson	Iowa Association of County Attorneys, Fremont County Attorney
Department of Transportation	Dennis Kleen	Iowa Department of Transportation
State Medical Examiner	Dr. Dennis Klein	Iowa Office of the State Medical Examiner

Expertise/Specialty	Name	Organization
Department of Natural Resources	Tammie Krausman	Iowa Department of Natural Resources
HHS Medical Director	Dr. Robert Kruse	Iowa HHS
Sudden Infant Death	Casey Manser	Iowa SIDS Foundation
Mental Health Nurse Practitioner	Amy McCormick	Vera French Community Mental Health
Department of Public Safety	Matthew Burns	Department of Public Safety, Department of Criminal Investigations – Major Crimes Division
Family Practice Physician	Dr. Dawn Schissel	Iowa Association of Family Physicians
Domestic Abuse and Injury Prevention	Abby Schueller	University of Iowa Prevention Research Center
Deputy State Medical Examiner	Dr. Jonathan Thompson	Iowa Office of the State Medical Examiner
Emergency Room Nurse, Medical Examiner Investigator	Marvin Van Der Wiel	Iowa Emergency Nurses Association
Child Protection Policy Program Manager	Vera Wallican	Iowa HHS
Department of Education, School Nursing	Melissa Walker	Iowa Department of Education
Medicolegal Death Investigator	Kelly Wandishion	Iowa Office of the State Medical Examiner

Domestic Abuse Death Review Subcommittee Membership List

Expertise/Specialty	Name	Organization
The state medical examiner or the state medical examiner's designee.	Dr. Kelly Kruse	Iowa Office of the State Medical Examiner
A licensed physician or nurse who is knowledgeable concerning domestic abuse injuries and deaths, including suicide.	Maria Sue Nelson	Unity Point
A licensed mental health professional who is knowledgeable concerning domestic abuse.	Dianne Fagner	
A representative or designee of the Iowa coalition against domestic violence.	Lindsay Pingel	Iowa Coalition Against Domestic Violence
A certified or licensed professional who is knowledgeable concerning substance abuse.	Jennifer Robertson-Hill	Iowa HHS
A law enforcement official who is knowledgeable about domestic abuse.	Cpt. Sadie Weekley	Marshalltown Police Department
A law enforcement investigator experienced in domestic abuse investigation.	Steve Kivi	Poweshiek County Sheriff's Office
An attorney experienced in prosecuting domestic abuse cases.	Rachel Zimmermann Smith	Johnson County Attorney
A judicial officer appointed by the chief justice of the supreme court.	Judge David Porter	State of Iowa Judicial Branch – District 5
A clerk of the district court appointed by the chief justice of the supreme court.	Vacant	
An employee or subcontractor of the department of corrections who is a trained batterers' education program facilitator	Christine Parmerlee	Iowa Department of Corrections
An attorney licensed in this state who provides criminal defense assistance or child custody representation, and who has experience in dissolution of marriage proceedings.	Andrea McGinn	The Law Shop
A female former victim of domestic abuse.	Tiffany Allison	
A male former victim of domestic abuse.	Matt Denner	
A family member of a decedent whose death resulted from domestic abuse	Vacant	

Maternal Mortality Review Subcommittee Membership List

Expertise/Specialty	Name	Organization
Subcommittee Chair/OB-GYN	Dr. Stephanie Radke	University Iowa of Hospitals and Clinics
Violence Prevention	Derma Rivera	Iowa HHS
Perinatal Psychiatry	Dr. Rebecca Lundquist	Unity Point, Broadlawns Hospital
OB/GYN	Dr. Debra Piehl	OB/Gyn Associates PC
Anesthesiology	Dr. Kokila Thenuwara	University Iowa of Hospitals and Clinics
MCH Epidemiologist	Dr. Debbie Kane	Iowa HHS
Pathology	Dr. Stephanie Stauffer	University Iowa of Hospitals and Clinics
Healthy Start Director	Cindy Winn	EveryStep
State Medical Director	Dr. Robert Kruse	Iowa HHS
Maternal Fetal Medicine	Dr. Christian Pettker	University Iowa of Hospitals and Clinics
Family Medicine/OB	Dr. Trish Millner	University Iowa of Hospitals and Clinics
Family Medicine/OB	Dr. Amy Jochims	Avera Medical Group
Clinical Nurse Improvement Coach	Kristal Graves	Waverly Health Center
OB/GYN	Dr. Diana Kaufman	Unity Point Clinic – Lakeview
Director of Maternal/Child Services	Amy Dagestad	AWHONN
Doula	Jazzmine Brooks	Jai Olive Wellness
Psychiatry, Director of Opioid Addiction Clinic	Dr. Alison Lynch	University Iowa of Hospitals & Clinics
OB/GYN	Dr. Kimberly Marshall	Great River Women's Health
OB/GYN	Dr. Emily Boevers	Waverly Health Center
Certified Nurse Midwife	Karlea Norby	
Emergency Medicine	Dr. Stacey Marlow Fisher	Unity Point Clinic – Waterloo
Law Enforcement	Ryan Kedley	Iowa Department of Public Safety
Emergency Medical Services	Gary Ronzheimer	City of Muscatine
Emergency Medical Services	Andy Littler	City of West Des Moines
OB/GYN, Maternal Fetal Medicine Fellow	Dr. Emma James	University Iowa of Hospitals and Clinics
OB/GYN	Dr. Shannon Leveridge	MercyOne Genesis - Bettendorf