

Independent Advisory Panel on Deaths in Custody

Work priorities for 2025/26

About the Independent Advisory Panel on Deaths in Custody

The Ministerial Council on Deaths in Custody formally commenced operation on 1 April 2009 and is jointly sponsored by the Ministry of Justice, the Department of Health and Social Care and the Home Office.

The Council consists of three tiers:

- Ministerial Board on Deaths in Custody
- Independent Advisory Panel (IAPDC)
- Practitioner and Stakeholder Group

The remit of the IAPDC (and overall of the Council) covers deaths, natural and self-inflicted, which occur in prisons, in or following police custody, immigration detention, the deaths of residents of approved premises and the deaths of those detained under the Mental Health Act (MHA) in hospital. The principles and lessons learned as part of this work also apply to the deaths of those detained under the Mental Capacity Act in hospital.

The role of the IAPDC, a non-departmental public body, is to provide independent advice and expertise to Ministers, senior officials and the Ministerial Board. It provides guidance on policy and best practice across sectors and makes recommendations to Ministers and operational services. It assists Ministers to meet their human rights obligations to protect life. The IAPDC's aim is to bring about a continuing and sustained reduction in the number and rate of deaths in all forms of state custody in England and Wales.

Lynn Emslie chairs the IAPDC.

The other members are:

- Professor Seena Fazel, Professor of Forensic Psychiatry at the University of Oxford
- Dr Jake Hard, Associate Clinical Director for the South West Prisons, Oxleas NHS Foundation Trust
- Kate Eves OBE, independent consultant on custodial safety and oversight
- Andrew Harris, Professor of Coronial Law, William Harvey Research Institute, Queen Mary's University and Coroner, South London

Further information on the IAPDC can be found on its website: <https://www.iapondeathsincustody.org/>

Terms of reference for IAPDC

The IAPDC will:

- Act as the primary source of independent advice to Ministers and service leaders (both through the Ministerial Board and where appropriate directly) on measures to reduce the number and rate of deaths in custody;
- Consult and engage with partners in order to collect, analyse and disseminate relevant information about deaths in custody and the lessons that can be learned from them;
- Commission relevant research;
- Carry out thematic enquiries into areas of concern, in co-operation as appropriate with the relevant oversight and investigative bodies;
- Issue formal guidance (and where appropriate set standards) on best practice for reducing deaths in custody and state detention, both on its own authority and where appropriate under the authority of the Ministerial Board;
- Monitor compliance with such guidance and standards;
- Where appropriate, make recommendations to Ministers for changes in policy or operational practice, which would help to reduce the incidence of death in custody.

Strategic principles

In order to prevent deaths within our remit, the IAPDC will:

Approach to advice

- seek to enable Ministers to meet their human rights obligations to protect life;
- provide advice that is strategic and implementable by those receiving it;
- promote the adoption and implementation of its advice;

Working practices

- draw on the Panel's knowledge and experience of relevant issues;
- draw on research evidence to underpin its work and identify gaps in knowledge;
- build on prior work and avoid duplicating work being undertaken elsewhere;
- recognise that – as a small independent non-departmental public body with limited resources – it should work strategically;

Guiding principles

- wherever possible in developing recommendations and advice, consult people in custody, their families or significant others, and bereaved families;
- place equality and diversity at the heart of its work;
- work within and draw upon the UK's domestic and international human rights framework;

Relationship to co-sponsoring departments and wider stakeholders

- embrace the cross-departmental nature of its remit and seek involvement at an early stage with departmental initiatives;
- develop strategic partnerships and work collaboratively with stakeholders to share information and knowledge;
- engage with a broad range of stakeholders including people with lived experience and other expertise, e.g. Practitioner Stakeholder Group.

The Independent Advisory Panel on Deaths in Custody's work priorities for 2025/26

Objectives and workstreams

The Panel's remit covers deaths in England and Wales within prisons, Approved Premises, immigration detention, police custody, and detention under the Mental Health Act (MHA).

The Panel's objectives and workstreams for 2025/26 are the following:

Data and investigations

1. Improving investigations of deaths in MHA detention

Progress the proposal for putting the investigations of deaths under the MHA on an independent footing, and scope changes to existing investigations and clinical reviews to improve the process more widely.

2. Examining the links between prison capacity and safety

Following publication of the Panel's report, 'Prison overcrowding and deaths in England & Wales', further investigate modelling evidence of increased mortality in Category B prisons, examine healthcare implications of modelling findings, and further explore what factors may underlie the findings of increased mortality overall.

3. Investigating access to mental health provision in prisons

Review accessibility of mental health provision, starting with a deep dive into reports of deaths in custody involving mental health transfer delays and reception screening issues.

4. Mapping the safety landscape in Approved Premises

Map and evaluate current safety measures to prevent deaths in Approved Premises and the procedures in place following a death or 'near miss'.

5. Examining the use of force during arrest

Conduct a review of deaths following the use of force, including deaths after detention under section 136 MHA and involving the use of restraint, with a particular focus on questions of disproportionality.

6. Reviewing and improving the impact of coroners' Prevention of Future Deaths (PFD) reports

Conduct a deep dive into responses to PFD reports between 2022 and 2024, cross-referencing with responses to Panel consultation following 2023 report into PFD process.

Implementation and practice

7. Developing a national approach to ligature reduction in prisons

Take forward recommendations of the Panel's paper, 'Ligature deaths in prisons in England and Wales: trends and reduction strategies', including scoping development of a national strategy and looking at building design and refurbishment standards, partly via a cross-sector MBDC Policy Forum on the subject. Identify learning that can be drawn from, and applied, across custody sectors, including MHA detention, police custody, and Approved Premises.

8. Improving access to support to better prevent post-police custody suicides

Work with the College of Policing and the National Police Chiefs' Council (NPCC) to roll-out new guidance on supporting individuals most at risk of suicide upon release from police custody, and work with the NPCC on data collection exercises across all forces in England and Wales to improve information and inform targeted interventions for those most at risk.

9. Strengthening responses to those in need of urgent care in immigration detention

Contribute to the development of the clinical guidance and training required for updated Rules 34 and 35 as part of Adults and Risk Policy. Attend the Task & Finish group for the updated Emergency response Detention Services Order pilot in Yarl's Wood IRC.

10. Supporting learning and best practice for family liaison following deaths in custody

Work with Family Liaison Staff across all custodial settings to assist in supporting learning and best practice approaches to providing family liaison following deaths in custody, consulting across sectors and organisations to consider best practice in communication with families, to update, improve, and better promote the Panel's Principles of Family Liaison.