

HEALTH & SAFETY CODE

CHAPTER 672. ADULT FATALITY REVIEW AND INVESTIGATION

Sec. 672.001. DEFINITIONS. In this chapter:

(1) "Abuse" means:

(A) the negligent or wilful infliction of injury, unreasonable confinement, intimidation, or cruel punishment with resulting emotional or physical harm leading to death; or

(B) sexual abuse of an adult, including any involuntary or nonconsensual sexual conduct that would constitute an offense under Section 21.08, Penal Code, or Chapter 22, Penal Code.

(2) "Autopsy" and "inquest" have the meanings assigned by Article 49.01, Code of Criminal Procedure.

(3) "Family violence" has the meaning assigned by Section 71.004, Family Code.

(4) "Health care provider" means any health care practitioner or facility that provides medical evaluation or treatment, including dental and mental health evaluation or treatment.

(5) "Review" means a reexamination of information regarding a deceased adult from relevant agencies, professionals, and health care providers.

(6) "Review team" means an unexpected fatality review team established under this chapter.

(7) "Unexpected death" includes a death of an adult that before investigation appears:

(A) to have occurred without anticipation or forewarning; and

(B) to have been caused by suicide, family violence, or abuse.

Added by Acts 2001, 77th Leg., ch. 1486, Sec. 1, eff. Sept. 1, 2001.

Sec. 672.002. ESTABLISHMENT OF REVIEW TEAM. (a) A multidisciplinary and multiagency unexpected fatality review team may be established for a county to conduct reviews of unexpected deaths that occur within the county. A review team for a county with a population of less than 50,000 may join with an adjacent county or counties to establish a combined review team.

(b) The commissioners court of a county may oversee the activities of the review team or may designate a county department to oversee those activities. The commissioners court may designate a nonprofit agency or a political subdivision of the state involved in the support or treatment of victims of family violence, abuse, or suicide to oversee the activities of the review team if the governing body of the nonprofit agency or political subdivision concurs.

(c) Any person who may be a member of a review team under Subsection (d) may initiate the establishment of a review team and call the first organizational meeting of the team.

(d) A review team may include:

(1) a criminal prosecutor involved in prosecuting crimes involving family violence;

(2) a peace officer;

(3) a justice of the peace or medical examiner;

(4) a public health professional;

(5) a representative of the Department of Protective and Regulatory Services engaged in providing adult protective services;

(6) a mental health services provider;

(7) a representative of the family violence shelter center providing services to the county;

(8) the victim witness advocate in the county prosecutor's office;

(9) a representative from the battering intervention and prevention program for the county; and

(10) a community supervision and corrections department officer.

(e) Members of a review team may select additional team members according to community resources and needs.

(f) A review team shall select a presiding officer from its members.

(g) Members selected under Subsection (e) must reflect the geographical, cultural, racial, ethnic, and gender diversity of the county or counties represented.

(h) Members selected under this section should have experience in abuse, neglect, suicide, family violence, or elder

abuse.

Added by Acts 2001, 77th Leg., ch. 1486, Sec. 1, eff. Sept. 1, 2001.

Sec. 672.003. PURPOSE AND POWERS OF REVIEW TEAM. (a) The purpose of a review team is to decrease the incidence of preventable adult deaths by:

(1) promoting cooperation, communication, and coordination among agencies involved in responding to unexpected deaths;

(2) developing an understanding of the causes and incidence of unexpected deaths in the county or counties in which the review team is located; and

(3) advising the legislature, appropriate state agencies, and local law enforcement agencies on changes to law, policy, or practice that will reduce the number of unexpected deaths.

(b) To achieve its purpose, a review team shall:

(1) develop and implement, according to local needs and resources, appropriate protocols;

(2) meet on a regular basis to review fatality cases suspected to have resulted from suicide, family violence, or abuse and recommend methods to improve coordination of services and investigations between agencies that are represented on the team;

(3) collect and maintain data, as appropriate; and

(4) submit the report required under Section 672.008.

Added by Acts 2001, 77th Leg., ch. 1486, Sec. 1, eff. Sept. 1, 2001.

Sec. 672.004. DUTIES OF PRESIDING OFFICER. The presiding officer of a review team may:

(1) send notices to the review team members of a meeting to review a fatality involving suspected suicide, family violence, or abuse;

(2) provide a list to the review team members of each fatality to be reviewed at the meeting; and

(3) ensure that the review team operates according to the protocols developed by the review team.

Added by Acts 2001, 77th Leg., ch. 1486, Sec. 1, eff. Sept. 1, 2001.

Sec. 672.005. REVIEW PROCEDURE. (a) The review team of the county in which the event that was the cause of the unexpected death occurred, as stated on the death certificate or as otherwise indicated by the medical examiner or justice of the peace notified of the death, may review the death.

(b) On receipt of the list of fatalities under Section 672.004, each review team member shall review available records for information regarding each listed unexpected death.

Added by Acts 2001, 77th Leg., ch. 1486, Sec. 1, eff. Sept. 1, 2001.

Sec. 672.006. ACCESS TO INFORMATION. (a) A review team may request information and records regarding adult deaths resulting from suicide, family violence, or abuse as necessary to carry out the review team's purpose and duties. Records and information that may be requested under this section include:

(1) medical, dental, and mental health care information; and

(2) information and records maintained by any state or local government agency, including:

(A) a birth certificate;

(B) law enforcement investigative data;

(C) medical examiner investigative data;

(D) juvenile court records;

(E) parole and probation information and records; and

(F) adult protective services information and records.

(b) On request of the presiding officer of a review team, the custodian of the relevant information or records relating to the deceased adult shall provide the information or records to the review team. A law enforcement agency or a medical examiner may decline to provide investigative data to a review team until after the conclusion of the investigation.

(c) This section does not authorize the release of the original or copies of the mental health or medical records of any member of the deceased adult's family, the guardian or caretaker of the deceased adult, or an alleged or suspected perpetrator of family violence or abuse of the adult that are in the possession of any state or local government agency as provided in Subsection (a)(2). Information relating to the mental health or medical condition of a member of the deceased adult's family, the guardian

or caretaker of the deceased adult, or the alleged or suspected perpetrator of family violence or abuse of the deceased adult acquired as part of an investigation by a state or local government agency as provided in Subsection (a)(2) may be provided to the review team.

(d) This section does not authorize any interference with a criminal investigation, inquest, or autopsy.

Added by Acts 2001, 77th Leg., ch. 1486, Sec. 1, eff. Sept. 1, 2001.

Sec. 672.007. MEETING OF REVIEW TEAM. (a) A meeting of a review team is closed to the public and not subject to the open meetings law, Chapter 551, Government Code.

(b) This section does not prohibit a review team from requesting the attendance at a closed meeting of a person who is not a member of the review team and who has information regarding a fatality resulting from suicide, family violence, or abuse.

(c) Except as necessary to carry out a review team's purpose and duties, members of a review team and persons attending a review team meeting may not disclose what occurred at the meeting.

Added by Acts 2001, 77th Leg., ch. 1486, Sec. 1, eff. Sept. 1, 2001.

Sec. 672.008. REPORT. (a) Not later than December 15 of each even-numbered year, each review team shall submit to the Department of Protective and Regulatory Services a report on deaths reviewed.

(b) Subject to Section 672.009, the Department of Protective and Regulatory Services shall make the reports received under Subsection (a) available to the public.

Added by Acts 2001, 77th Leg., ch. 1486, Sec. 1, eff. Sept. 1, 2001.

Sec. 672.009. USE OF INFORMATION AND RECORDS; CONFIDENTIALITY. (a) Information and records acquired by a review team in the exercise of its purpose and duties under this chapter are confidential and exempt from disclosure under the open records law, Chapter 552, Government Code, and may only be disclosed as necessary to carry out the review team's purpose and duties.

(b) A report of a review team or a statistical compilation of data reports is a public record subject to the open records law, Chapter 552, Government Code, as if the review team were a governmental body under that chapter, if the report or statistical compilation does not contain any information that would permit the identification of an individual and is not otherwise confidential or privileged.

(c) A member of a review team may not disclose any information that is confidential under this section.

(d) A person commits an offense if the person discloses information made confidential by this section. An offense under this subsection is a Class A misdemeanor.

Added by Acts 2001, 77th Leg., ch. 1486, Sec. 1, eff. Sept. 1, 2001.

Sec. 672.010. CIVIL LIABILITY FOR DISCLOSURE OF INFORMATION. Subject to the limits described in Section 101.023(b), Civil Practice and Remedies Code, a team organized pursuant to this chapter, or any member thereof, may be civilly liable for damages caused by the disclosure of information gathered pursuant to an investigation if such disclosure is made in violation of Section 672.007 and Section 672.009.

Added by Acts 2001, 77th Leg., ch. 1486, Sec. 1, eff. Sept. 1, 2001.

Sec. 672.011. GOVERNMENTAL UNIT. Subject to Section 672.010, a review team established under this chapter is a local governmental unit for purposes of Chapter 101, Civil Practice and Remedies Code.

Added by Acts 2001, 77th Leg., ch. 1486, Sec. 1, eff. Sept. 1, 2001.

Sec. 672.012. REPORT OF UNEXPECTED FATALITY. (a) A person, including a health care provider, who knows of the death of an adult that resulted from, or that occurred under circumstances indicating death may have resulted from, suicide, family violence, or abuse, shall immediately report the death to the medical examiner of the county in which the death occurred or, if the death occurred in a county that does not have a medical examiner's office or that is not part of a medical examiner's district, to a justice of the peace in that county.

(b) The requirement of this section is in addition to any other reporting requirement imposed by law.

Added by Acts 2001, 77th Leg., ch. 1486, Sec. 1, eff. Sept. 1, 2001.

Sec. 672.013. PROCEDURE IN THE EVENT OF REPORTABLE DEATH. (a) A medical examiner or justice of the peace notified of a death under Section 672.012 may hold an inquest under Chapter 49, Code of Criminal Procedure, to determine whether the death was caused by suicide, family violence, or abuse.

(b) Without regard to whether an inquest is held under Subsection (a), the medical examiner or justice of the peace shall immediately notify the county or entity designated under Section 672.002(b) of:

(1) each notification of death received under Section 672.012;

(2) each death found to be caused by suicide, family violence, or abuse; or

(3) each death that may be a result of suicide, family violence, or abuse, without regard to whether the suspected suicide, family violence, or abuse is determined to be a sole or contributing cause and without regard to whether the cause of death is conclusively determined.

Added by Acts 2001, 77th Leg., ch. 1486, Sec. 1, eff. Sept. 1, 2001.