



**Manitoba Advocate
for Children and Youth**

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

**MANITOBA ADVOCATE RELEASES SPECIAL REPORT: SHIFTING THE LENS:
UNDERSTANDING AND CONFRONTING INEQUITIES IN SLEEP-RELATED INFANT DEATHS IN
MANITOBA**

Advocate re-issues recommendations from *Safe and Sound: A Special Report on the Unexpected Sleep-Related Deaths of 145 Manitoba Infants* and recommends the Government of Manitoba improve the social determinants of health for all Manitobans.

OCTOBER 10, 2024 – TREATY 1 TERRITORY, HOME OF THE RED RIVER MÉTIS, Winnipeg, MB.

Today, Manitoba Advocate for Children and Youth Sherry Gott released *Shifting the Lens: Understanding and Confronting Inequities in Sleep-Related Infant Deaths in Manitoba*, a special report which re-examines the issue of sleep-related infant deaths. This report is a re-framed follow-up to the 2020 Special Report *Safe and Sound: A Special Report on the Unexpected Sleep-Related Deaths of 145 Manitoba Infants*. It highlights the increased responsibility governments hold in preventing these tragedies.

"This report demonstrates that risks for sleep-related infant deaths do not just derive from individual decisions, behaviours, and practices. Rather, they are in large part the result of the conditions of people's daily lives and the wider set of factors and systems that shape them. These are known as the social determinants of health and are factors over which caregivers and families have very little control," said Manitoba Advocate Sherry Gott. **"It is unfair and ineffective to place the burden of prevention of sleep-related infant deaths solely on the shoulders of caregivers. Rather, it is the responsibility of the Government of Manitoba to ensure the equitable distribution of the social determinants of health so every infant has an equal chance to thrive no matter who they are, where they live, or who their caregivers may be."**

Shifting the Lens closely examines the context and circumstances of 48 infants who died in their sleep environment between 2019 and 2021 in Manitoba. The findings reveal how social and structural factors hold strong associations to an infant's ability to flourish. The report

also discusses the larger widespread issues which persist in Manitoba. **"Taken together, the findings presented in *Shifting the Lens* show us that sleep-related infant deaths must be viewed as a symptom of larger social issues demanding recognition and rectification,"** stated Gott. The report highlights the importance of harm-reduction messaging in prevention initiatives and provides an overview of key children's rights and the government's corresponding obligations under international human rights law in the context of preventing sleep-related infant deaths.

Shifting the Lens re-issues recommendations made in the *Safe and Sound* (2020) special report, as they relate to the following:

- improving access to information and resources related to safe sleep surfaces;
- ensuring public education and training around mitigating sleep-related infant death risks is available, accessible, respectful, and targeted;
- improving the collection, tracking, monitoring, and analysis of sleep-related infant deaths, risk factors, and associated trends; and
- enhancing opportunities for safe sleep conversations.

The Manitoba Advocate has also released one new recommendation:

The Manitoba Advocate for Children and Youth recommends the Government of Manitoba, working across and in collaboration with government departments and Indigenous Governing Bodies, take concrete, targeted, and sustained steps to progressively improve the social determinants of health for all Manitobans.

In implementing this recommendation, consideration should be given to:

- Developing a comprehensive strategy to tackle the social determinants of health and health inequities across the whole of government and the whole of Manitoba.
- Measuring and monitoring the social determinants of health and health equity, and assessing the impacts of policy and programmatic actions.
- Working to progressively improve early child development, access to fair employment and decent work, social protection coverage, and living conditions and environments.
- Establishing mechanisms to finance cross-government action on the social determinants of health, and to allocate finance fairly between geographical regions and social groups.

"This report and the associated recommendations are a bold call for real action, which is exactly what is needed to drive concrete and sustained change for infants and their

caregivers in Manitoba," said Gott. "Working to ensure the rights of infants and their caregivers in Manitoba are honoured, respected, protected, and fulfilled is a shared responsibility and obligation that every one of us must prioritize and actionize. With commitments from all involved to work together and move forward in a good way, we are hopeful there will be better outcomes for infants across Manitoba."

Read *Shifting the Lens: Understanding and Confronting Inequities in Sleep-Related Infant Deaths in Manitoba* here: <https://manitobaadvocate.ca/reports-publications/special-reports/>

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About the Manitoba Advocate for Children and Youth

The Manitoba Advocate for Children and Youth (MACY) is an independent, non-partisan office of the Manitoba Legislative Assembly. The office represents the rights, interests, and viewpoints of children, youth, and young adults throughout Manitoba who are receiving, or should be receiving, provincial public services. MACY does this by providing direct advocacy support to young people and their families, by reviewing public service delivery after the death or serious injury of a child, and by conducting child-centred research regarding the effectiveness of public services in Manitoba. The Manitoba Advocate is empowered by legislation to make recommendations to improve the effectiveness and responsiveness of services provided to children, youth, and young adults. MACY is mandated through The Advocate for Children and Youth Act, guided by the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child, and acts according to the best interests of children and youth.