National Child Mortality Database (NCMD)
Quality Improvement Plan 2026-2028
July 2026 - June 2028

1. Introduction

The National Child Mortality Database (NCMD) has been commissioned to collect, analyse and disseminate information arising from child death reviews undertaken across England and to support learning that contributes to the prevention of future child deaths.

The purpose of the child death review (CDR) process is to understand how and why children die and to identify modifiable factors where action may reduce the risk of future deaths. Since its establishment, NCMD has worked with Child Death Overview Panels (CDOPs), Child Death Review Partners and other stakeholders to improve the quality and completeness of data submitted for national analysis and to strengthen the consistency of the child death review process.

As the programme enters its next phase, there is an opportunity to focus more explicitly on the quality of review activity itself. Feedback from CDOPs and analysis of national data demonstrate variation in review processes, application of national guidance and identification of modifiable factors. Improving the quality and consistency of reviews is essential to ensuring that learning is reliably identified and translated into meaningful local and national action.

A key focus for 2026-2028 will be supporting implementation of NCMD's national modifiable factors guidance. Variation in the interpretation and application of modifiable factors can affect the consistency of review outcomes and the ability to identify opportunities for prevention. Through a structured programme of education, learning and support, NCMD will work with Child Death Review professionals to promote a shared understanding of the guidance and strengthen confidence in its application.

The overarching aim of the Quality Improvement (QI) programme for 2026-2028 is therefore:

To improve the quality, consistency and impact of child death reviews across England by supporting the consistent identification, classification and application of modifiable factors through implementation of NCMD's national guidance and the development of reviewer confidence and capability.

The programme will continue to be guided by four key questions:

1. What do the data tell us about current practice and variation?
2. What are stakeholders telling us are the priorities for improvement?
3. What does good practice look like?

4. How can learning and effective practice be shared and adopted consistently?

2. Quality Improvement Goals

Goal 1: Improve identification and application of modifiable factors

The identification of modifiable factors is central to the child death review process and to the prevention of future child deaths. NCMD has developed and published national guidance to support a more consistent approach to identifying, recording and classifying modifiable factors. During 2026-2028, implementation of this guidance will be the primary focus of the NCMD Quality Improvement Programme.

- Promoting awareness and use of the national modifiable factors guidance.
- Reducing variation between panels.
- Improve consistency in interpretation of modifiable factors guidance nationally.
- Develop shared understanding of thresholds and decision making.
- Increase reviewer confidence when determining modifiable factors.
- Improve the quality of documentation and rationale recorded during reviews.
- Improve the translation of identified factors into preventative action.

NCMD will use national data and stakeholder feedback to identify areas where further clarification, examples or support may be helpful.

Goal 2: Build reviewer confidence, knowledge and capability

High-quality reviews depend on knowledgeable and confident professionals. To support this objective NCMD will develop and deliver a new series of webinars:

Reviewing with Confidence: National Learning Programme

Reviewing with Confidence will be the principal educational delivery mechanism supporting implementation of the modifiable factors guidance. Through regular webinars, including case discussions, NCMD will support professionals involved in child death review to apply the guidance consistently and confidently.

The programme will provide practical support to individuals involved in child death review processes, including CDOP members, Chairs, administrators and CDR professionals.

The programme will:

- Address common challenges encountered during reviews into specific types of death e.g. how to conduct an effective suicide review.
- Explore challenging case examples
- Promote consistent interpretation of guidance.
- Support new CDOP members and Chairs.
- Create opportunities for peer discussion and reflection.

- Identify areas where further clarification is required.

Topics will be informed by stakeholder feedback, emerging themes and findings from NCMD analyses.

Goal 3: Improve the quality and consistency of CDOP reviews

Consistent application of the modifiable factors guidance and increased reviewer confidence are expected to contribute directly to improvements in the quality and consistency of CDOP reviews across England.

NCMD will support CDOPs to undertake high-quality reviews that are robust, consistent and focused on learning and prevention.

The programme will seek to:

- Improve the consistency of review processes across England.
- Support effective multidisciplinary discussion and decision-making.
- Promote high-quality recommendations arising from reviews.
- Reduce unwarranted variation in review outcomes.
- Share examples of effective practice and innovative approaches.

Success will be reflected in increased confidence among reviewers and greater consistency in review findings nationally.

Goal 4: Strengthen the use of learning from reviews to drive improvement

The ultimate purpose of child death review is prevention. NCMD will continue to work with stakeholders to ensure that learning arising from reviews is translated into practical actions at local, regional and national level.

Activities will include:

- Dissemination of thematic findings to relevant stakeholders.
- Collaboration with professional organisations, policymakers and charities.
- Promotion of examples where review findings have informed service improvement or policy change.
- Support for implementation of recommendations arising from NCMD reports.

Goal 5: Contribute evidence to the development and implementation of national standards and guidance.

NCMD will contribute evidence and expertise to national work aimed at improving the child death review system.

This includes:

- Supporting future revisions to child death review guidance where appropriate.
- Providing evidence from NCMD analyses to inform policy development.
- Identifying areas where additional clarification or guidance may improve review quality.

- Supporting implementation and dissemination of updated guidance and standards.

Findings arising from implementation of the modifiable factors guidance, stakeholder feedback and NCMD analyses will inform future discussions regarding national child death review guidance and standards. Where opportunities arise, NCMD will contribute evidence to support revisions that improve the quality, consistency and effectiveness of child death reviews.

3. Planned Quality Improvement Work Programme

Workstream	Planned Activity
Modifiable Factors Guidance Implementation Programme	Promote, monitor and support implementation of the national modifiable factors guidance across Child Death Review services.
Reviewing with Confidence	Deliver a national webinar programme focused on application of the guidance, case discussion, decision making and reviewer confidence.
Review Quality & Consistency	Monitor variation in review practice and identify opportunities for further support and improvement.
Learning resources	Develop case studies, FAQs, examples of good practice and supplementary guidance informed by stakeholder feedback.
Stakeholder engagement	Engage CDOPs, Child Death Review Partners and professional bodies to gather feedback and identify ongoing challenges.
Guidance development and review	Identify areas where clarification or future revisions to national guidance may improve review quality and consistency.

4. Improvement Methods

4.1 Stakeholder Engagement

The views and experiences of stakeholders are central to the NCMD quality improvement programme.

We will continue to engage with:

- Child Death Overview Panels.
- Child Death Review Partners.
- Health and care professionals.
- Professional organisations.
- Academic and research partners.
- Third sector organisations.

- Bereaved parents and families.

Feedback will be used to identify priorities, evaluate activities and inform future work.

4.2 Communications and Learning

NCMD will use a range of communication methods to disseminate learning and support improvement, including:

- National webinars.
- Stakeholder events.
- Website resources.
- Learning briefings.
- Electronic newsletters.
- Social media and professional networks.
- Targeted communications linked to thematic reports.

Particular emphasis will be placed on promoting use of the modifiable factors guidance and supporting participation in the Reviewing with Confidence programme.

5. Measurement and Evaluation

Progress will be monitored throughout the programme and reported through NCMD governance arrangements.

Measures may include:

Process Measures

- Number of Reviewing with Confidence webinars delivered.
- Attendance and engagement with webinars.
- Number of accesses/downloads of modifiable factors guidance.
- Number of improvement resources developed and disseminated.
- Participation in stakeholder engagement activities.

Outcome Measures

- Increased confidence in identifying and classifying modifiable factors.
- Improved consistency in application of NCMD modifiable factors guidance.
- Reduction in unwarranted variation between panels.
- Improved quality of rationale recorded for modifiable factor decisions.
- Positive feedback on the usefulness of Reviewing with Confidence resources and webinars.

Impact Measures

- Evidence of local or national changes resulting from child death review learning.
- Adoption of NCMD recommendations and resources.
- Improved dissemination of prevention messages arising from identified modifiable factors.

- Evidence that learning arising from identification of modifiable factors is translated into local action.
- Increased use of modifiable factor findings in local prevention initiatives.
- Improved consistency of national learning generated through child death reviews.

6. Governance

The NCMD Steering Group will oversee delivery of this Quality Improvement Plan and review progress against agreed objectives.

Progress will be reported through established NCMD governance structures and reflected in annual reporting and impact assessments.

This plan will be reviewed annually to ensure that activities remain aligned with stakeholder priorities, emerging evidence and developments within the child death review system.