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# Toddler death spurs calls on pools

## Adam Cooper

The Victorian government has again been urged by a coroner to implement better pool safety after the drowning death of a two-year-old boy, who left his sleeping mother and entered a backyard pool through a faulty gate.

The death of Elijah Meldrum on September 14, 2015, was preventable, said coroner Audrey Jamieson, who found the rental property's tenants failed to tell their landlord and letting real estate agency that the pool's two gates were not working.

Ms Jamieson's call on the state government to overhaul pool fencing regulations and consider a register

similar to that in Queensland is the fourth time since 2012 that a Victorian coroner has recommended action to prevent child drownings.

Figures released by the Coroners Court show 26 children drowned in domestic pools in Victoria between 2000 and the start of 2015. In most cases fences or gates were either faulty or left open. In every case the level of adult supervision was assessed as inadequate.

Elijah and his mother, Lisa Carter, were staying with Edward Hewett and Kristina Wilson at their rented home in Melton South when the tod-

dlar woke and went to the pool.

The inquest heard that to get outside, Elijah may have opened sliding

doors that could be opened easily by the couple's dogs.

Ms Carter woke and found her son in the pool. He could not be revived. The inquest heard she had sublet off Mr Hewett and Ms Wilson because she had nowhere else to go, but had not planned to stay long as the couple argued frequently.

Police found the home to be squalid, with dog faeces on the lounge floor and rotting food in the couple's room. Tests on Elijah's hair found that he had been exposed to amphetamine use.

Ms Jamieson found it was "deeply disturbing" the Department of Health and Human Services failed to ensure Ms Carter engaged with the support services that she required.

The coroner said Elijah's death occurred amid "the suboptimal involvement of the DHHS, the lackadaisical approach about responsibilities to the child by a number of adults and the seemingly perpetually inadequate regulation of swimming pools in Victoria".

Ms Jamieson called on the state government to overhaul pool fencing regulations and establish a state-wide register, ensure owners get

pool safety certificates when selling properties, and have pool gates and fences be a specific part of real estate inspections.

"In Victoria it is relatively simple for properties with pool safety barriers and gates that do not meet regulatory standards to remain undetected," she said.

Since Queensland introduced better regulations in 2010 that state's rate of child drownings in pools had halved, the coroner said.

Elijah's inquest was told the property's owner and letting agents were unaware the pool gates were faulty.

Ms Jamieson said it was incumbent on Mr Hewett and Ms Wilson to notify the agent. "Despite their intimate knowledge of the state of the pool safety barriers, they nevertheless unofficially sublet the premises to Lisa, a woman with a two-year-old son, without seeking to ensure the safety of the property."