

FACT SHEET 3

How a Coroner investigates a death



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Initial stage

- Once a report of a death is received by the coroner, usually from the police, doctors or hospital, the deceased person is taken into the care of the Coroner's Court and a coroner will begin their investigation.
- The coroner receives from the police a brief containing all the relevant information, including witness statements, police reports, toxicology report, photos and other forensic material.

The gathering of information stage

Based on all of the information and evidence gathered, the investigating coroner will decide if the death requires further investigation, or if the death was due to natural causes.

- An investigation may vary with the circumstances of the death but may include:
 - attending the scene where the death occurred;
 - taking possession of anything which the coroner reasonably believes is relevant to the investigation; or
 - directing a pathologist or a doctor to perform a post mortem examination on the body (for more information, see Fact Sheet 5: Next of Kin and the Coroner's Court and Fact Sheet 8: My loved one's body and things, if you wish to object to an autopsy being performed).
- The Coroner's Court will communicate with the senior next of kin throughout the investigation process.

Making a finding

In most cases, the coroner will complete a "Record of Investigation Death Form", which includes the coroner's findings.

When investigating a death, if possible, the coroner must make the following findings:

- the identity of the deceased
- how the death occurred;
- the cause of the death; and
- the detail needed to register the death with Births, Deaths, and Marriages.

If there is no mandatory requirement to hold an inquest into the death and the coroner decides that there is no public interest to be served in making a finding as to how the death occurred, a coroner does not have to make a finding as to how a death occurred.

A coroner may comment on any matters connected with a death, including matters relating to public health or safety or the administration of justice.

Where the death is of a person held in care, a coroner must comment on the quality of the supervision, treatment, and care of the person while in that care.

A coroner must not include a finding, comment, or any statement that a person is, or may be, guilty of any offence or civilly liable for something. However, a coroner may report to:

- the Director of Public Prosecutions if the coroner believes that an indictable offence has been committed in connection with a death which the coroner investigated; or
- the Commissioner of Police if the coroner believes that a simple offence has been committed in connection with a death which the coroner investigated.



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