

FACT SHEET 6

Cultural Protocols in Coronial Investigations



THIRRILI

This fact sheet explains the role of culture in a coronial inquest when a family member dies and who you can speak to for help to get the coroner to understand your traditions.

Cultural considerations

Making the coroner understand our sorry business and culture

- If your loved one died in an unexpected death, then the Aboriginal Engagement Unit (**AEU**) will support you through the coronial process and talk to you about your cultural protocols and the required sorry business. The AEU is made up of mob. You can email them at Kooriccov@courts.vic.gov.au or call them on (03) 8685 1157.
- The AEU will have a meeting with the family within four weeks of the death and then give the coroner a document explaining the relevant cultural issues specific to the person who has died and their community.

Visiting a deceased person

- The deceased person can be visited while at the Institute of Forensic Medicine, which is next to the Coroners Court. Family and friends can visit, alone or in groups. Things like a possum skin cloak and Aboriginal flag can be placed over the deceased. Ask the AEU about arranging a visit to see the deceased and what you need to make the visit more culturally appropriate.

For more information, see Fact Sheet 9: My loved one's body and things.

Smoking ceremony at an inquest

- A smoking ceremony is always held on the first hearing day of an inquest into the death of an Aboriginal person. If you want to know more about this, speak to the AEU.

Culturally significant items and Acknowledgment of Country

- You can display items such as a possum skin cloak, didgeridoo, and other cultural symbols at a hearing. You can request a specific Acknowledgement of Country. You can put up photos of your loved one. Speak to the AEU about what you would like to bring.

Using use the name and images/videos of the deceased

- The coroner will use the name of the deceased in a hearing, but you can ask for a different name to be used instead. Tell the AEU what you would like your loved one called.
- Videos or photos may be used of the deceased. Speak to the AEU about how this can be managed.

Next of kin

- Even though there is a set process for deciding the senior next of kin, the coroner also welcomes input on who the senior next of kin should be from a cultural perspective. Speak to the AEU if you have something you want the coroner to know.

Language

- The Coroners Court of Victoria can try to organise an interpreter who speaks your language at the hearing. You or your lawyers should contact the AEU in advance of the hearing to ensure an interpreter can be organised.

Men's or Women's business

- The AEU can help you arrange for the coroner to be aware, understand, and respect sensitive men's or women's business that may be talked about in the inquest hearing.

More help

The Coroners Court of Victoria can be contacted via phone of email: 1300 309 519 or at courtadmin@coronerscourt.vic.gov.au

The Aboriginal Engagement Unit of the Coroners Court can be contacted via phone of email: (03) 8685 1157 or kooriccov@courts.vic.gov.au

The Victorian Aboriginal Legal Service can be contacted via phone of email: 1800 064 865 or email vals@vals.org.au to obtain legal advice on the above.

If you are struggling with the death of a loved one, you can call 13YARN (13 92 76) for free support.



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