

**OFFICE OF THE CHIEF MEDICAL EXAMINER
ACTIVITY PLAN
2026-29**

Message from the Chief Medical Examiner

I am pleased to present the Office of the Chief Medical Examiner Activity Plan for April 1, 2026 to March 31, 2029. This plan was prepared under my direction and in accordance with the provisions of the **Transparency and Accountability Act**.

The Office of the Chief Medical Examiner (OCME) is classified as a Category 3 Government Entity and, as such, must prepare an Activity Plan taking into consideration the strategic directions of Government applicable to the Department of Justice and Public Safety. I have taken those directions into account.

As Chief Medical Examiner, I am accountable for the preparation of this plan and the achievement of its objectives.

A handwritten signature in blue ink, appearing to read 'N. Denic', followed by a horizontal line.

Nebojsa (Nash) Denic, M.D., M.S., PhD, F.R.C.P.C.

Forensic Pathologist and Chief Medical Examiner
Province of Newfoundland and Labrador

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Overview

The **Fatalities Investigations Act** (the Act) states that the Chief Medical Examiner is responsible to the Minister of Justice and Public Safety for the operation of the Act in relation to the reporting, investigating and recording of deaths.

Approximately 1,000 deaths per year come to the attention of the Office of the Chief Medical Examiner (OCME) and must be investigated as per the OCME's mandate. Deaths considered reportable are those due to violence; accident or suicide; improper or negligent treatment; sudden and unexpected or occur when an individual is not under active medical care at the time of death; or when the cause of death cannot be determined. Deaths of this nature account for approximately 15 per cent of the deaths within Newfoundland and Labrador. The OCME also approves cremations by reviewing the death certificates in approximately 75 per cent of all deaths in the province. According to the Estimates of the Program Expenditure and Revenue of the Consolidated Revenue Fund, the OCME operates with a budget of \$2,664,100.

The OCME includes the Chief Medical Examiner, one full-time and one part-time Medical Examiner who are trained forensic pathologists. There are also two rural pathologists with Newfoundland and Labrador Health Services in the western region, conducting work under the direction of the OCME. The work of these pathologists is directed by and subject to review by the Chief Medical Examiner and is limited to cases which are non-criminal or suspicious in nature. Assistance in reportable death investigations is provided by both the Royal Newfoundland Constabulary and the Royal Canadian Mounted Police who are, by virtue of their office, medical examiner investigators. The OCME is committed to providing equitable services in accordance with the Government of Newfoundland and Labrador's commitment to Gender-Based Analysis Plus (GBA+).

Operational support is provided by an Administrative Officer I, a Stenographer II, two Autopsy Assistants, and two Medical Examiner Investigators. Administrative and operational oversight is provided by the Manager of Corporate Services. The office also has an embedded Public Health Officer from the federal Public Health Agency of Canada.

The OCME is located in the Health Sciences Centre, Prince Philip Parkway, St. John's. The OCME is an independent entity of the Department of Justice and Public Safety; however, cooperation with multiple external agencies, including law enforcement and health organizations, is essential to the success of its operation.

Active investigative files are presently stored at the OCME main office at the Health Sciences Centre, and archival files at the Provincial Records Centre, located at 190 East White Hills Rd, in St. John's.

Mandate

Pursuant to Section 3 of the Act, the responsibilities of the Chief Medical Examiner include:

- the administration of the Act in relation to the reporting, investigating and recording of deaths;
- the appointment of physicians as medical examiners and the supervision of the performance of medical examiners and pathologists performing medicolegal investigative duties;
- the appointment of medical investigators;
- the appointment of an Acting Chief Medical Examiner who may act in the place of the Chief Medical Examiner;
- the development and maintenance of facilities that may be required for the purpose of the Act; and,
- the education of persons required to perform functions under the Act.

The OCME does not present separate Lines of Business as they are reflected in the Mandate.

Primary Clients

The Office of the Chief Medical Examiner primarily serves the people of the province by investigating and reporting on sudden and unexpected deaths, as outlined in the Act, and approving all cremation requests in the province.

The OCME also supports the following through its work:

- Royal Newfoundland Constabulary
- Royal Canadian Mounted Police
- Public Prosecutions Branch, Department of Justice and Public Safety
- Transportation Safety Board
- Workplace NL
- Government of Newfoundland and Labrador, Occupational Health and Safety
- Private insurance companies
- NL Health Services Provincial Medical Genetics Program
- Public Health Agency of Canada

Vision

To provide evidence-based death investigation services for the province of Newfoundland and Labrador, in accordance with the **Fatalities Investigations Act**, and collaborate with external entities in ethical research activities conducted in the interest of public safety.

Additional information on OCME can be found at the following link:
<https://www.gov.nl.ca/jps/departments/branches/division/division-ocme/>

Strategic Issues

Issue 1: Compliance with Fatalities Investigations Act

The OCME responds to reportable deaths as defined by the Act. The response to a particular death is dependent upon the circumstances, decedent's health, and the level of health care at the time of death. Each case involves a review of information submitted by medical examiner-investigators, next-of-kin, and other medical professionals. A certain number of cases undergo post-mortem examinations. In circumstances of skeletal remains, Forensic Anthropologist services are retained. The focus of the OCME will not change over each of the three fiscal years covered by this plan.

Objective 1: By March 31 of each year, the OCME will have responded to deaths that are reported in accordance with the **Fatalities Investigations Act**.

Indicators:

- Conducted medical examiner investigations in Newfoundland and Labrador.
- Ordered and/or conducted external post-mortem examinations, as appropriate.
- Ordered and/or conducted medicolegal autopsies, as appropriate.
- Reported on causes and manners of death.

Issue 2: Development of new OCME facility

Currently, the OCME is situated in an area of the Health Sciences Centre that cannot accommodate the number of individuals working at the office, as well as the workflow and volume and work. The employees of the OCME are dispersed throughout the general area of the laboratory medicine program of Newfoundland and Labrador Health Services, impacting interpersonal communications and workflow. The current autopsy room is sub-optimal for the volume of cases that the OCME sees increasing from year to year. There is also no separate autopsy suite for the infectious or decomposed cases which fall within the scope of the OCME. As such, OCME has been working with partners to develop a new OCME space that would better accommodate the needs of the OCME and enhance its operations.

The renovation of the new OCME space at the Health Science Centre is on-going. Activities undertaken within Newfoundland and Labrador Health Services include completion of the future OCME footprint design as well as the identification and sourcing of new equipment. All deficiencies will be resolved through the on-going renovation. Proposed completion date for the new OCME facility is in 2027 and will continue to be a focus throughout the 2026-29 planning period.

Objective 1: By March 31, 2027, the demolition of OCME's future space will have been completed in accordance with the approved floor plan for the new autopsy suite and office space.

Indicator: Demolition of the dedicated OCME future space is completed.

Objective 2: By March 31, 2028, the OCME will have completed the renovation of the dedicated future space and ensured necessary infrastructure and resources are in place.

Objective 3: By March 31, 2029, the OCME will have completed the renovation of the new OCME autopsy suite and office space and transitioned from its current location to the newly renovated space.

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