

Office of the Chief Medical Examiner
Annual Report 2024-25

Message from the Chief Medical Examiner

I hereby present the 2024-25 Annual Report of the Office of the Chief Medical Examiner (OCME). This report was prepared in accordance with the provisions of the **Transparency and Accountability Act**. My signature below is indicative of my accountability for the results reported.

As a Category 3 Government Entity, the OCME is required to report on activities carried out in the last fiscal year. The information presented in this report outlines the activities of the Office from April 1, 2024, to March 31, 2025.



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Chief Medical Examiner
Province of Newfoundland and Labrador

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Overview

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

Approximately 900 deaths per year come to the attention of the OCME as considered reportable under the Act. Deaths which are considered reportable are those which are due to violence, accident or suicide, improper or negligent treatment, are 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 reviewed the death certificates and approved 4,732 cremations in 2024-25 This represents approximately 77 per cent of all deaths in the province.

The Chief Medical Examiner appoints physicians to act as Medical Examiners. In addition to the Chief Medical Examiner, one full-time and one part-time Medical Examiner (forensic pathologists) and one Medical Examiner Investigator are working at the OCME. An Administrative Officer I, Stenographer II, and a Manager of Corporate Services provide administrative support. In 2024-25 the OCME was successful in its recruitment efforts and filled three vacancies. These vacancies include a second Medical Examiner Investigator and two newly created Autopsy Assistant positions.

There are also three rural pathologists of the Provincial Health Authority handling non-complicated autopsies/examinations on behalf of the OCME. The work of these pathologists is directed by and subject to review by the Chief Medical Examiner, and their work is limited to non-criminal or non-suspicious cases. Assistance in sudden death investigations is provided by police officers employed by the Royal Newfoundland Constabulary (RNC) and the Royal Canadian Mounted Police (RCMP), who are, by virtue of their office, medical examiner investigators.

The OCME is located in the Health Sciences Centre, Prince Philip Parkway, St. John's. The OCME is an independent entity under 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. Files related to the investigations conducted by the OCME are presently stored at the OCME office, at the Health Sciences Centre and at the Provincial Records Centre, located at 190 East White Hills Rd., in St. John's.

Mandate

Pursuant to Section 3 of the **Fatalities Investigation Act**, some of the main 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.

Vision

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

Highlights and Partnerships

In addition to post-mortem examination and autopsies, the Chief Medical Examiner reviews non-fatal trauma cases for police and Crown Attorneys to interpret and determine the mechanism of trauma. The OCME also reviews all requests for cremations, as well as for transport of human remains in to and out of the province. The OCME receives many requests during the year to analyze bones found by citizens or police throughout the province. These bones/remains are analyzed to determine whether they are human in origin.

The OCME provides statistics to various public health and safety organizations such as the Public Health Agency of Canada, Statistics Canada, the Canadian Red Cross, and the Lifesaving Society, in addition to responding to numerous media requests throughout the year. The Chief Medical Examiner also sits on the Child Death Review Committee and the Atlantic Domestic Homicide Review Network. The OCME is affiliated with Memorial University as it provides training to medical students and residents, as well as a death scene investigation course for RNC and RCMP officers.

Report on Activities

Issue 1: Compliance with Fatalities Investigations Act

The OCME responds to reportable deaths as defined by the **Fatalities Investigations Act**. The response depends upon the circumstances of death, examination of the scene, the deceased’s health and the level of health care at the time of death, and witness statements. Some cases may require the assistance of a Forensic Anthropologist. The objective and indicators for the OCME are consistent for the 2023-26 planning period and the associated indicators will be reported on for each year of the planning period.

Objective 1: By March 31, 2025, the Office of the Chief Medical Examiner will have responded to deaths that are reported in accordance with the **Fatalities Investigations Act**.

Indicators	2024-25 Results *
Conducted reviews of medical examiner’s files	932
Ordered and/or conducted external post-mortem examinations, as appropriate	151
Ordered and/or conducted medicolegal autopsies, as appropriate	322
Recorded and reported on causes and manners of death	896

* These numbers reflect closed case statistics from the Government of Newfoundland and Labrador fiscal year, from April 1, 2024, to March 31, 2025, rather than the calendar year.

Issue 2: Development of new OCME facility

In 2017, a report titled “A Report Concerning the Office of the Chief Medical Examiner” outlined deficiencies within the OCME and made 65 recommendations for improvement, including a new OCME facility. The OCME then participated in a pre-design analysis of the office, including a 20-year functional program. The functional program identified current and future service delivery assumptions, design considerations, staffing estimates, all required spaces and a high-level concept plan. This initial analysis was completed by the then Eastern Health Authority (now under Newfoundland and Labrador Health Services) in 2018. It included a class D cost estimate based on the functional program and a preliminary phasing plan. A review and revision of the functional plan was proposed in March of 2024, which would incorporate a new morgue complex. The focus and objective for OCME is consistent for each fiscal year including 2024-25.

Objective 2: By March 31, 2025, the Office of the Chief Medical Examiner will have collaborated with representatives of the new provincial health authority on the development and renovation of a new dedicated OCME autopsy suite and office space

within the Health Sciences Centre including receiving approval for an updated functional program.

Indicators	2024-25 Results
Met with Health Authority and consultant representatives regarding functional infrastructure planning	Met with Newfoundland and Labrador Health Services and its design consultants to finalize the floor plan for the proposed OCME space.
Received phasing plan and critical path timelines for infrastructure development as part of an updated functional program.	The floor plan for the proposed OCME space has been finalized and the phasing plan and critical path timelines have been established, relative to necessary changes within NLHS.
Begun renovation of new OCME space.	The proposed new OCME space has been identified and the floor plan is nearing completion. An RFP for demolition of the existing space is expected in the fall of 2025.

2025-26 Indicators:

Met with Newfoundland and Labrador Health Services to develop an operational process plan for the newly renovated morgue space.

Finalized design of new OCME space in consultation with NLHS and architectural design representatives.

Engaged with NLHS to review RFP submissions for development of new OCME space as per finalized infrastructure development plan.

Opportunities and Challenges

In 2016, the OCME underwent an operational review. The report was released in early 2017. The review aimed to identify operational deficiencies and make appropriate recommendations to correct them. Of the 65 recommendations identified in the 2016 operational review of the OCME, there are 15 remaining recommendations which will be addressed by the renovation of the new OCME space at the Health Sciences Centre in St. John's, as well as the implementation of new case management system.

The new case management software, will enable more efficient data collection, analysis and data sharing, improving insights for public safety reporting and policy development. It will also improve the overall delivery of services by the OCME.

Through the development of a new morgue and long-term storage facility by Newfoundland and Labrador Health Services at the Health Sciences Centre, issues related to unclaimed remains and morgue capacity have been addressed. This should further improve the flow through the OCME and minimize challenges related to morgue overcapacity.

Financial Statements

Expenditure and revenue figures included in this document are unaudited and based on public information provided in the Report on the Program Expenditures and Revenues of the Consolidated Revenue Fund for the Year Ended 31 March 2025 (unaudited). The Office of the Chief Medical Examiner is not required to provide a separate audited financial statement.

2.3.04. OFFICE OF THE CHIEF MEDICAL EXAMINER

	Actuals \$	Estimates
		Original Budget \$
01. Salaries.....	1,184,789	1,615,000
Operating Accounts:		
<i>Employee Benefits</i>	2,246	9,000
<i>Transportation and Communications</i>	8,140	13,100
<i>Supplies</i>	18,713	13,500
<i>Professional Services</i>	258,130	256,500
<i>Purchased Services</i>	1,018,604	704,000
<i>Property, Furnishings and Equipment</i>	2,288	2,400
02. Operating Accounts.....	1,308,301	998,500
M27 Related Revenue.....	-	(320,000)
Total: Office of the Chief Medical Examiner...	2,493,091	2,293,500

Contact us

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