

Office of the Chief Medical Examiner
Annual Report 2025-26

Message from the Chief Medical Examiner

I hereby present the 2025-26 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, 2025, to March 31, 2026.



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Forensic Pathologist and Chief Medical Examiner
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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 investigating, reporting, and recording deaths.

Approximately 1000 deaths per year come to the attention of the OCME as considered reportable under the Act. Deaths considered reportable are those which are due to violence, accident or suicide, improper or negligent treatment; are sudden and unexpected; 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 percent of the deaths within Newfoundland and Labrador. The OCME reviewed the death certificates and approved approximately 4,800 cremations in 2025-26. This represents approximately 75 percent of all deaths in the province.

The Chief Medical Examiner appoints physicians to act as Medical Examiners. In addition to the Chief Medical Examiner, the OCME is staffed by one full-time and one part-time Medical Examiner (forensic pathologists), two autopsy assistants, and one Medical Examiner Investigator. An Administrative Officer I, Stenographer II, and a Manager of Corporate Services provide administrative support. There is a Public Health Officer from the Public Health Agency of Canada embedded with the office.

There are two rural pathologists of the Newfoundland and Labrador Health Services in Western region, 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 to members of the Royal Newfoundland Constabulary (RNC) and the Royal Canadian Mounted Police (RCMP), who are, by virtue of their office, medical examiner investigators. Additional investigative support is provided internally by the Medical Examiner Investigator of the OCME.

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

Mandate

Pursuant to Section 3 of the **Fatalities Investigations 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 and any related medico-legal issues. The OCME also reviews all requests for cremation, as well as the transport of human remains into 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 office is also responsible for establishing identification of the deceased and the cause and manner of death in cases of skeletal remains, in coordination with a Forensic Anthropologist from Memorial University of Newfoundland, and the RCMP's National Centre for Missing Persons and Unidentified Remains.

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, witness statements, the deceased's health and the level of health care at the time of death. 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, 2026, the Office of the Chief Medical Examiner will have responded to deaths that are reported in accordance with the **Fatalities Investigations Act**.

Indicators	2025-26 Results *
Conducted reviews of medical examiner's files.	982
Ordered and/or conducted external post-mortem examinations, as appropriate.	191
Ordered and/or conducted medicolegal autopsies, as appropriate.	231
Recorded and reported on causes and manners of death.	952

* These numbers reflect closed case statistics from the Government of Newfoundland and Labrador fiscal year, from April 1, 2025, to March 31, 2026, 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 2025-26.

Objective 2: By March 31, 2026, 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	2025-26 Results
Met with Newfoundland and Labrador Health Services to develop an operational process plan for the newly renovated morgue space.	Reviewed and approved operational process plan with NLHS project manager. Established a revised timeline based on temporary NLHS needs for the new OCME area, due to operational requirements at NLHS. The revised operational process plan would see demolition for the new OCME space scheduled to begin mid-to-late November 2026. Construction of the new OCME space would begin once demolition was complete.
Finalized design of new OCME space in consultation with NLHS and architectural design representatives.	Met with NLHS project manager and architectural representatives. Developed operational and infrastructure requirements list for the new OCME space. Finalized and signed off on the design of the new OCME space.
Engaged with NLHS to review RFP submissions for development of new OCME space as per finalized infrastructure development plan.	Discussed operational process plan delay with NLHS project manager. Revised process plan to accommodate NLHS need for continued occupancy of the new OCME space. NLHS will have vacated the new OCME space by early to mid-September 2026. The tender for the final design package of the new OCME space is scheduled to be issued by late September – early October 2026 with review of submission and contract award of the tender to be completed by early November. Initial estimates for the construction phase were eighteen months from the contract award date. Changes to the estimated completion date of the OCME renovation, if required, will be made after contract award.

Opportunities and Challenges

The new morgue within the Health Sciences Centre has been completed, which includes a dedicated space for the OCME cases. This also provides secure, dedicated space for mass casualty events.

As part of the new NLHS disposition process for unclaimed remains, the Chief Medical Examiner is now approving all requests for final disposition of unclaimed remains in the province.

The ongoing shortage of family physicians in the province has put additional workload on the office, which has created some challenges within the OCME. In the absence of a family physician, the registration of death is done by the Medical Examiners of the OCME, which requires full investigation. This places additional administrative pressure on both the OCME and law enforcement, who are primary scene investigators.

The procurement of a new case management software solution remains underway. A preferred vendor has been selected, and contract negotiations are ongoing. The opportunity to obtain new case management software will assist operations at the OCME, as the new system is expected to strengthen data integrity and support more advanced analytical and reporting capabilities.

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 2026 (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.....	1,447,035	1,644,700
Operating Accounts:		
<i>Employee Benefits.....</i>	2,744	9,000
<i>Transportation and Communications.....</i>	9,747	12,600
<i>Supplies.....</i>	14,857	12,000
<i>Professional Services.....</i>	276,628	246,500
<i>Purchased Services.....</i>	824,391	719,800
<i>Property, Furnishings and Equipment.....</i>	0	2,400
02. Operating Accounts.....	1,128,367	1,002,300
M27 Related Revenue.....	(70,000)	(120,000)
Total: Office of the Chief Medical Examiner...	2,505,402	2,527,000

Contact us

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