

OFFICE OF THE CHIEF MEDICAL EXAMINER

ACTIVITY PLAN

2008 - 2011

Message from the Chief Medical Examiner:

I am pleased to present the Activity Plan for the Office of the Chief Medical Examiner which outlines the goals for the years 2008-2011. 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 is classified as a Category 3 Government Entity and, as such, must prepare an activity plan taking into consideration the strategic directions of the Minister of Justice. I have taken those strategic directions into account and have determined that none are applicable at this time.

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



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Chief Medical Examiner
Province of Newfoundland and Labrador

Introduction

The Office of the Chief Medical Examiner is responsible for operation of the *Fatalities Investigations Act*. The *Act* provides for the reporting, recording and the investigation, where necessary, of deaths that are reportable in accordance with the provisions of the *Act*.

Approximately seven hundred deaths per year come to the attention of the Office of the Chief Medical Examiner. 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 and cases where the cause of death cannot be determined. Deaths of this nature account for approximately 30% of the deaths within a jurisdiction.

The Office of the Chief Medical Examiner is also responsible for appointing physicians to act as medical examiners. In addition to the Chief Medical Examiner, there are twenty medical examiners practicing within the province in various locations. The work of these medical examiners is subject to review by the Chief Medical Examiner. Assistance in investigation is provided by police officers employed by the Royal Newfoundland Constabulary and the Royal Canadian Mounted Police who are, by virtue of their office, medical examiner's investigators.

Plan at a Glance

- Vision: An environment where the Office of the Chief Medical Examiner responds to those deaths that are appropriately reported in accordance with the *Fatalities Investigations Act*.
- Goal 1: During the time frame 2008-2011, the Office of the Chief Medical Examiner will have responded to deaths that are reported in accordance with the *Fatalities Investigations Act*.

Overview

The Office of the Chief Medical Examiner is located at the Health Sciences Centre, Prince Philip Drive, St. John's. Independence of the Office of the Chief Medical Examiner is heightened and enhanced through the employment of the Chief Medical Examiner as a full Professor at Memorial University of Newfoundland's Faculty of Medicine.

Administrative support is provided by an Administrative Officer with additional clerical support provided for a portion of the year. Recent files (five years) related to the investigations conducted by the office are maintained at the Office of the Chief Medical Examiner whilst archived files are presently stored at the old Janeway site, a facility of Eastern Health.

The Office of the Chief Medical Examiner receives reports of approximately seven hundred sudden and unexpected deaths per year. For fiscal year 2007-2008 the Government of Newfoundland and Labrador has budgeted \$483,300.00 for expenditures associated with the Office of the Chief Medical Examiner.

Mandate

The mandate of the Office of the Chief Medical Examiner is contained in the *Fatalities Investigations Act, Chapter F-6.1, SNL 1995*. The Chief Medical Examiner is responsible for operation of the *Act* in relation to the reporting, investigating and recording of deaths, the appointment of physicians as medical examiners and supervision of the performance of their duties required by the *Act*, the appointment of medical examiner's investigators and the education of persons required to perform functions in accordance with the *Act*.

Values

The core values of the Office of the Chief Medical Examiner provide a guiding framework for those who are required to perform duties in accordance with the *Fatalities Investigations Act*. These values and related action statements are:

Independence: The Chief Medical Examiner ensures the independence of the office is maintained by acting in a neutral fashion when engaged in investigating and reporting sudden and unexpected deaths.

Impartiality & Fairness: The Chief Medical Examiner and Medical Examiners perform their work without bias.

Empathy: The Chief Medical Examiner and employees of the Office of the Chief Medical Examiner deal fairly and respectfully with individuals who are affected by a sudden and unexpected death.

Who We Serve

The Office of the Chief Medical Examiner serves the citizens of Newfoundland and Labrador by investigating those deaths which are reportable to determine the cause and manner of death.

The office also provides information on decedents whose death has been investigated to interested parties, as determined by the Chief Medical Examiner, to help establish an individual's current medical history and/or treatment or to resolve a relative's questions related to a particular death.

The Office of the Chief Medical Examiner assists family members affected by sudden and unexpected deaths by providing the necessary information to insurance companies, such as completion of medical forms, to resolve claims and to assist in the settling of estates. This service is provided free of charge and constitutes a significant portion of the time spent interacting with the public.

Statistical information regarding the number and causes of death are provided by the office to various federal and provincial government and non-government agencies, amongst which are Transport Canada and the Red Cross. In addition, where possible, the office will participate in research undertaken by graduate students or agencies such as the Newfoundland and Labrador Centre for Health Information.

Vision

An environment where the Office of the Chief Medical Examiner responds to those deaths that are appropriately reported in accordance with the *Fatalities Investigations Act*.

Mission

The Office of the Chief Medical Examiner, as a category 3 entity, has the options of adopting the Department of Justice mission indicating how it contributes to that mission or developing its own mission. The Office of the Chief Medical Examiner acts as an arms length entity and it is not appropriate to adopt the Mission Statement of the Department of Justice. The departmental mission is focused on the work of the department and the Office of the Chief Medical Examiner does not have a direct role at this time.

Issues

Compliance with *Fatalities Investigations Act*.

In consideration of government's strategic directions and those of the Department of Justice, the following area has been identified as the key priority of the Office of the Chief Medical Examiner for the next four years.

Objectives and Measures:

Issue 1: The Office of the Chief Medical Examiner annually responds to approximately seven hundred reportable deaths, as defined by the *Fatalities Investigations Act*. The

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response to a particular death is dependent upon the circumstances of the decedent's health, level of health care at the time of death and the suspected cause of death. Some cases may involve a review of information submitted by a medical examiner, a post-mortem examination or even the assistance of a Forensic Anthropologist. The focus of the Office of the Chief Medical Examiner is consistent over three years of the plan. Each year, the Office of the Chief Medical Examiner will report on the results of the 2008-2009, 2009-2010 and 2010-2011 objectives.

Objective: During the time frame 2008-2011, the Office of the Chief Medical Examiner will have responded to deaths that are reported in accordance with the *Fatalities Investigations Act*.

Measure: Response to reported deaths.

Indicators: Conduct file reviews of medical examiner's reports.

Order and/or conduct post-mortem examinations as appropriate.

Order and/or conduct autopsies as appropriate.

Record and report on cause of death.