

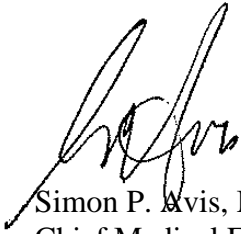
Office of the Chief Medical Examiner

Annual Report 2014 -15

Message from the Chief Medical Examiner

I hereby present the 2014-15 Annual Report of the Office of the Chief Medical Examiner. 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 Office of the Chief Medical Examiner is required to report at an activity level. The information presented in this report outlines the activities of the Office from April 1, 2014 to March 31, 2015. Specific data reported are for the calendar year of 2013, the most recent year for which completed records are available.



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Chief Medical Examiner
Province of Newfoundland and Labrador

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Overview

The Office of the Chief Medical Examiner is located in 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 in Memorial University of Newfoundland's Faculty of Medicine.

Administrative support is provided by an Administrative Officer with additional clerical support provided by a medical dictatypist. Files related to the investigations conducted by the Office are presently stored at the central office in St. John's for the previous five years. Older files are stored off site.

During the calendar year 2013, the Office of the Chief Medical Examiner investigated 430 deaths that were reportable under the *Fatalities Investigations Act*, Chapter F-6.1, SNL 1995. According to the *Report on the Program Expenditures and Revenues of the Consolidated Revenue Fund Year Ended 31 March 2015*, actual expenditures of the Office of the Chief Medical Examiner were \$832,456.

Mandate

The mandate of the Office of the Chief Medical Examiner is contained in the *Fatalities Investigations Act*. 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*.

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*.

Facts of Interest

During the calendar year 2013, the Office of the Chief Medical Examiner investigated 430 deaths that met the criteria for reporting under sections 5, 6, 7 and 8 of the *Fatalities Investigations Act*. The geographic location of reportable deaths were as follows:

1. Avalon Peninsula	218 (which includes 184 from metro St. John's)
2. Central Newfoundland	107
3. Western Newfoundland	78
4. Labrador	27

And included:

1. Natural deaths	272
2. Accidental deaths	79
3. Suicides	55
4. Homicides	7
5. Undetermined	17

Of the 79 accidental deaths, 52 included:

Motor vehicle deaths	33
Drug overdose	11
Drowning	8

The Office of the Chief Medical Examiner also performs a number of other duties. The information provided is from the 2013 calendar year (excluding cremation permits), which was the most recent year for which the information was available at the time this report was prepared.

The Office receives many requests during the year to analyze bones found by citizens or police throughout the province. These bones are analyzed to determine whether or not they are human remains. During 2013, the Chief Medical Examiner received eleven requests from police jurisdictions for examination. In all eleven cases the bones were determined to be non human in origin.

The Office of the Chief Medical Examiner also reviews all requests for cremations in the province. During the calendar year 2014, the Office reviewed 2,252 requests for cremations and issued the appropriate permits.

The Chief Medical Examiner also reviews certain non-fatal trauma cases. This occurs at the request of the police or crown attorneys for an analysis of trauma. During the calendar year 2013, the Chief Medical Examiner reviewed six non-fatal trauma cases.

The Office also provides statistics to various organizations regarding specific causes or manner of death. In 2013, the Office of the Chief Medical Examiner provided detailed information on the following:

Manner of Death	#
Drowning	8
Motor Vehicle Accident	33
Suicide	55

Report on Activities

Issue 1: Compliance with Fatalities Investigations Act

The Office of the Chief Medical Examiner responds to reportable deaths as defined by the *Fatalities Investigations Act*. The response to a particular death is dependent upon the circumstances of the deceased'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 the assistance of a Forensic Anthropologist.

The following information reports on the activities of the Office of the Chief Medical Examiner during fiscal year 2014-15.

Objective 1: During the timeframe 2014-17, the Office of the Chief Medical Examiner will have responded to deaths that are reported in accordance with the *Fatalities Investigations Act*.

Measure: Responded to reported deaths

Indicators	Results
Conducted file reviews of medical examiner's reports	430
Ordered and/or conducted post-mortem examinations, as appropriate	194
Ordered and/or conducted autopsies, as appropriate	147
Recorded and reported on cause of death	430

The focus of the Office of the Chief Medical Examiner is consistent over the next two years. This objective and the associated measure and indicators will be reported on again in 2015-16 and 2016-17 fiscal years.

Opportunities and Challenges Ahead

Since the implementation of the *Fatalities Investigations Act* in 1996, the number of deaths reported has declined from 703 in 1997 to 430 in 2013, and remains fairly consistent at this level. This decline was expected given that the criteria for reporting deaths is better defined than it was under the *Summary Proceedings Act*, the regime for reporting deaths is clearer, and knowledge of the *Fatalities Investigations Act* has increased. Under-reporting of deaths does occur, particularly in unnatural deaths that occur in health facilities and deaths that occur from workplace exposure, especially in cases where there is a time span between the incident and death. Educational sessions are provided to senior medical students as part of their curriculum in an effort to address these issues.

The Office of the Chief Medical Examiner has recognized that the present facilities and administrative software is in need of update. To this effect the forensic autopsy facility at the Health Sciences Centre has been approved funding for renovations, and office software has been requested from the Department of Justice and Public Safety. The aim is to obtain office management software to assist in the operation and management of the medical examiner's office.

The Office of the Chief Medical Examiner is presently working towards a centralized service for the province in relation to providing medical examiner service. Presently there is only one forensic pathologist providing 0.8 of a full-time equivalent position and a second providing 0.25 of a full-time equivalent position. Increasing the staffing level is a priority. While additional funds have been approved in the new fiscal year for additional medical examiner hours/services, the Office of the Chief Medical Examiner and the Department of Justice and Public Safety have committed to working together to advance a business case to address other operational and administrative challenges.

Toxicological analysis on deaths investigated by the Office of the Chief Medical Examiner in 2013 included 81 full toxicological analysis and 34 urine screens, compared to 70 full toxicological screens in 2012, 76 in 2011, 68 in 2010 and 45 in 2009. Monitoring of drug and drug-related deaths in the Province of Newfoundland and Labrador continues to be an important element of death investigation and presents potential challenges given the development of designer drugs. From the period 1997 to 2013, 28 per cent of all accidental drug overdose deaths have occurred in the two year period 2012 and 2013.

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 2015 (unaudited). The Office of the Chief Medical Examiner is not required to provide a separate audited financial statement.

2.3.03. OFFICE OF THE CHIEF MEDICAL EXAMINER

	Actual \$	Estimates	
		Amended \$	Original \$
01. Salaries	456,165	457,400	399,900
Operating Accounts:			
<i>Employee Benefits</i>	4,298	4,700	4,700
<i>Transportation and Communications</i>	6,693	13,200	13,200
<i>Supplies</i>	1,904	3,800	3,800
<i>Professional Services</i>	68,650	130,000	130,000
<i>Purchased Services</i>	294,746	338,200	230,700
<i>Property, Furnishings and Equipment</i>	-	2,500	2,500
02. Operating Accounts	376,291	492,400	384,900
Total: Office of the Chief Medical Examiner.....	832,456	949,800	784,800