

*Office of the Chief Medical Examiner*

*Activity Plan 2014-17*

## *Message from the Chief Medical Examiner*

I am pleased to present the Office of the Chief Medical Examiner Activity Plan 2014-17. 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 Provincial Government as communicated by the Minister of Justice. I have taken those directions into account and none are applicable at this time.

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



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**Simon P. Avis, M.D., F.R.C.P.C.**  
Chief Medical Examiner  
Province of Newfoundland and Labrador

# Table of Contents

|                           |   |
|---------------------------|---|
| <i>Introduction</i> ..... | 1 |
| <i>Overview</i> .....     | 1 |
| <i>Mandate</i> .....      | 2 |
| <i>Vision</i> .....       | 2 |
| <i>Values</i> .....       | 2 |
| <i>Who We Serve</i> ..... | 3 |
| <i>Mission</i> .....      | 3 |
| <i>Issue</i> .....        | 4 |

## Introduction

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

Approximately 700 deaths per year come to the attention of the Office of the Chief Medical Examiner (*not all of these deaths are considered 'reportable' under the legislation*). 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 per cent of the deaths within our 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 19 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 examiners investigators.

## 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 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. Files related to the investigations conducted by the office are presently stored at the L.A. Miller Centre, a facility of Eastern Health.

The Office of the Chief Medical Examiner receives reports of approximately 450 reportable deaths per year. According to the Estimates of the Program Expenditure and Revenue of the Consolidated Revenue Fund 2014-15, the Office of the Chief Medical Examiner operates with a budget of approximately \$784,800.

## 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 examiners' 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*.

## 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:

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| <i>Independence:</i>              | Each person acts in a neutral fashion when engaged in investigating and reporting sudden and unexpected deaths to ensure the independence of the office is maintained. |
| <i>Impartiality and Fairness:</i> | Each person performs his/her work without bias.  |
| <i>Empathy:</i>                   | Each person deals 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 reportable deaths, as defined by the *Fatalities Investigations Act*, to determine the cause and manner of death. Ultimately, the purpose of any death investigation system is for the protection of public safety.

The Office of the Chief Medical Examiner provides direct assistance to family members affected by sudden and unexpected deaths by providing the necessary documentation to insurance companies 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.

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.

The Office of the Chief Medical Examiner also reviews all requests for cremations in the province, and reviews all requests for approval to ship remains in and out of the Province.

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.

Statistical information regarding the number of deaths 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 Canadian 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.

## Mission

The Office of the Chief Medical Examiner, as a category 3 government entity, has the option of adopting the Department of Justice mission and identifying 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. Development of a mission with measures and indicators would be redundant to the objective which is already developed in the current activity plan.

## Issue

The Office of the Chief Medical Examiner considered government's strategic directions as communicated by the Minister of Justice and have concluded that none apply. As such, the key priority of the office is ensuring compliance with the *Fatalities Investigations Act*.

### 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 even the assistance of a Forensic Anthropologist. The focus of the Office of the Chief Medical Examiner is consistent over the three years of this plan. This objective and the associated measure and indicators will be utilized for the 2014-15, 2015-16, and 2016-17 fiscal years. Each year, the Office of the Chief Medical Examiner will report on the results of this objective in its annual report.

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| <b>Objective:</b>  | By March 31, 2015, the Office of the Chief Medical Examiner will have responded to deaths that are reported in accordance with the <i>Fatalities Investigations Act</i> . |
| <b>Measure:</b>    | <b>Responded to reported deaths</b>   |
| <b>Indicators:</b> | Conducted file reviews of medical examiners' reports  |
|                    | Ordered and/or conducted post mortem examinations, as appropriate   |
|                    | Ordered and/or conducted autopsies, as appropriate  |
|                    | Recorded and reported on cause of death   |

**Office of the Chief Medical Examiner**  
Health Sciences Centre  
300 Prince Philip Drive  
St. John's, NL A1B 3V6  
**Tel: (709) 777-6402**