

**OFFICE OF THE CHIEF MEDICAL EXAMINER
ACTIVITY PLAN
2023-26**

Message from the Chief Medical Examiner

I am pleased to present the Office of the Chief Medical Examiner Activity Plan 2023-26. 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 (OCME) is classified as a Category 3 Government Entity and, as such, must prepare an Activity Plan taking into consideration the strategic directions of Government applicable to the Department of Justice and Public Safety. I have taken those directions into account.

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



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Chief Medical Examiner

Province of Newfoundland and Labrador

Table of Contents

- Message from the Chief Medical Examiner i**
- Overview..... 3**
 - Mandate 2**
 - Vision 2**
- Strategic Issues 3**
 - Issue 1: Compliance with Fatalities Investigations Act..... 3**
 - Issue 2: Development of new OCME facility..... 3**

Overview

The **Fatalities Investigations Act** (the Act) states that the Chief Medical Examiner is responsible to the Minister of Justice and Public Safety for the operation of the 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, of which approximately 600 are 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 10 percent of the deaths within Newfoundland and Labrador. The OCME also approves cremations by reviewing the death certificates in approximately 67 per cent of all deaths in the province. According to the Estimates of the Program Expenditure and Revenue of the Consolidated Revenue Fund, the OCME operates with a budget of \$1,914,600.

The OCME is also responsible for appointing physicians to act as Medical Examiners. In addition to the Chief Medical Examiner, there are three Medical Examiners: two forensic pathologists and a rural pathologist. There are also seven rural pathologists handling non-complicated cases within the Health Authority. The work of these pathologists is directed by and subject to review of the Chief Medical Examiner, and their work is limited to cases which are non-criminal or suspicious in nature. 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 investigators.

The OCME is located in the Health Sciences Centre, Prince Philip Parkway, St. John's. The OCME is an independent entity. However, cooperation with multiple external agencies, including law enforcement and health organizations, is essential to the success of its operation.

Administrative support is provided by an Administrative Officer I, and a Stenographer II, both of whom are supervised by the Manager of Corporate Services. In 2022-23, the OCME had two Medical Examiner Investigators resign. Their role includes improvement and efficiency in the death investigations in the province. A recruitment process has been undertaken and is currently on-going to fill the vacant positions. Files related to the investigations conducted by the office 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 Act, the 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

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

Additional information on OCME can be found at the following link:

<https://www.gov.nl.ca/jps/departments/branches/division/division-ocme/>

Strategic Issues

Issue 1: Compliance with Fatalities Investigations Act

The OCME responds to reportable deaths as defined by the 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. Each case involves a review of information submitted by a medical examiner or other medical professional. Some cases also include post-mortem examinations including external exams or autopsies, or even the assistance of a Forensic Anthropologist. The focus of the Office of the Chief Medical Examiner will be consistent over each of the three fiscal years covered by this plan.

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

Indicators:

- Conducted reviews of medical examiner's files.
- Ordered and/or conducted external post-mortem examinations, as appropriate.
- Ordered and/or conducted medicolegal autopsies, as appropriate.
- Recorded and reported on causes and manners of death.

Issue 2: Development of new OCME facility

In 2017, a report titled "A Report Concerning the Office of the Chief Medical Examiner", outlined significant deficiencies within the OCME and made 65 recommendations for improvement, including that a new OCME facility be found. The OCME then participated in a pre-design analysis, including a 20-year functional program, of the office. The functional program identified current and future service delivery assumptions, design considerations, staffing estimates, schedule of accommodation that identified all required spaces and a high-level concept plan. This analysis was completed by the then Eastern Health regional health authority in 2018 and included a class D cost estimate based on the functional program and a preliminary phasing plan. This work is a part of renovations for Laboratory Services of the Eastern urban site in St. John's of the new Provincial Health Authority and are anticipated to commence in early 2024.

Objective 2: By March 31, 2024, 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:

- Met with Health Authority and consultant representatives regarding functional infrastructure planning.
- Received phasing plan and critical path timelines for infrastructure development as part of an updated functional program.
- Begun renovation of new OCME space.

Contact us

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