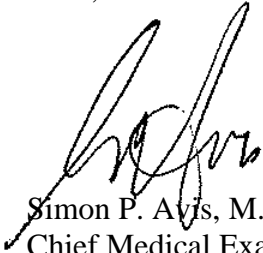


**Office of the Chief Medical Examiner**  
**Annual Activity Report 2015-16**

## Message from the Chief Medical Examiner

I hereby present the 2015-16 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, 2015 to March 31, 2016. Specific data reported are for the calendar year of 2014, the most recent year for which complete 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 2014, the Office of the Chief Medical Examiner investigated 524 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 2016, actual expenditures of the Office of the Chief Medical Examiner were \$1,096,276.

## 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 2014, the Office of the Chief Medical Examiner investigated 524 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	276	(includes 240 from metro St. John's)
2. Central Newfoundland	127	
3. Western Newfoundland	98	
4. Labrador	23	

And included:

1. Natural deaths	335
2. Accidental deaths	108
3. Suicides	70
4. Homicides	3
5. Undetermined	8

Of the 108 accidental deaths, 64 included:

Motor vehicle deaths	37	(includes 3 pedestrian deaths)
Drowning	15	
Drug overdose	12	

The Office of the Chief Medical Examiner also performs a number of other duties. The information provided is from the 2014 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 2014, the Chief Medical Examiner received six requests from police jurisdictions for examination. In all six 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 2015, the Office reviewed 2,359 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 2014, the Chief Medical Examiner reviewed 13 non-fatal trauma cases.

The Office also provides statistics to various organizations regarding specific causes or manner of death. In 2014, the Office of the Chief Medical Examiner provided detailed information on the following:

Type of Death	#
Drowning	13
Motor Vehicle Accident	37
Suicide	70

## 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 2015-16.

**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	524
Ordered and/or conducted post-mortem examinations, as appropriate	177
Ordered and/or conducted autopsies, as appropriate	189
Recorded and reported on cause of death	524

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

## Opportunities and Challenges Ahead

The number of deaths investigated in 2014 shows a 22 per cent increase from 2013. Part of this increase reflects the inclusion of deaths reported to the Medical Examiner which are technically not reportable under the *Fatalities Investigation Act*. Prior to 2014 these cases were not included in workload statistics. Such cases include deaths from natural causes where the deceased has known significant medical conditions and is under the care of a physician, but the attending physician has either refused to sign the death certificate or is not available to sign. Such deaths result in costly transportation charges, as well as significant investment of time by the Medical Examiner and office staff to provide for appropriate certification and release of the body to the next of kin. Next to salaries, transportation charges are the largest budget item of the Medical Examiner's Office. Inclusion of such deaths in the statistical work load is consistent with other Canadian jurisdictions.

The Office of the Chief Medical Examiner is located at the Health Sciences Center and utilizes rented office space, a dedicated autopsy room, and morgue facilities. While such facilities are undergoing renovations, the available space presents challenges with respect to security, storage and tracking of biological material, as well as office space. While secured storage space has been obtained, capacity is limited. In addition, digital office management capability requires updating to allow for more efficient workflow management. Recently the Government of Newfoundland and Labrador approved funding for a review of the Office of the Chief Medical Examiner to examine facilities, operational management, and personnel needs; such a review will hopefully provide recommendations that will assist in meeting the challenges ahead.

Toxicological analysis on deaths investigated by the Office of the Chief Medical Examiner in 2014 included 65 full toxicological analysis and 60 urine screens, compared to 81 full toxicological screens and 34 urine screens in 2013. Monitoring of drug and drug-related deaths in Newfoundland and Labrador continues to be an important element of death investigation. It also continues to present potential challenges given the emergence and evolution of designer drugs.

## 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 2016 (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.....	629,590	630,600	510,900
Operating Accounts:			
<i>Employee Benefits</i> .....	3,450	4,700	4,700
<i>Transportation and Communications</i> .....	2,927	13,200	13,200
<i>Supplies</i> .....	2,532	3,800	3,800
<i>Professional Services</i> .....	63,183	137,000	130,000
<i>Purchased Services</i> .....	394,147	342,000	230,700
<i>Property, Furnishings and Equipment</i> .....	447	2,500	2,500
02. Operating Accounts.....	466,686	503,200	384,900
<b>Total: Office of the Chief Medical Examiner...</b>	<b>1,096,276</b>	<b>1,133,800</b>	<b>895,800</b>