

**Office of the Chief Medical Examiner**  
**Annual Report 2022-23**

## Message from the Chief Medical Examiner

I hereby present the 2022-23 Annual Report of the Office of the Chief Medical Examiner (OCME). 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 OCME is required to report on activities carried out in the last fiscal year. The information presented in this report outlines the activities of the Office from April 1, 2022 to March 31, 2023.



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Chief Medical Examiner  
Province of Newfoundland and Labrador

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## Overview

The **Fatalities Investigations Act** (the Act) states that the OCME is responsible to the Minister of Justice and Public Safety for the operation of the Act in relation to reporting, investigating and recording of deaths.

Approximately 700 deaths per year come to the attention of the OCME, 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 per cent 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.

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 (RNC) and the Royal Canadian Mounted Police (RCMP) 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 Investigator vacancies. 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 **Fatalities Investigation Act**, some main 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 Office does not present separate Lines of Business as they are reflected in the Mandate.

### **Vision**

To provide evidence based death investigation services for the Province of Newfoundland and Labrador in accordance with the **Fatalities Investigations Act** and collaborate with external entities in ethical research activities conducted in the interest of public safety.

### **Highlights and Partnerships**

In addition to post-mortem examination and autopsies, the Chief Medical Examiner reviews non-fatal trauma cases for police and Crown Attorneys to interpret and determine mechanism of trauma. The OCME also reviews all requests for cremations, as well as the transportation of remains in and out of the province. The Office also receives many requests during the year to analyze bones found by citizens or police throughout the province. These bones/remains are analyzed to determine whether they are human in origin.

The Office provides statistics to various organizations such as the Public Health Agency of Canada, Statistics Canada, the Red Cross, and the Lifesaving Society, regarding specific cause or manner of death, in addition to responding to numerous media requests throughout the year. The Chief Medical Examiner also sits on the Child Death Review Committee and the Atlantic Domestic Homicide Review Network. The Office is affiliated with Memorial University as it provides training to medical students and residents, as well as a death scene investigation course for RNC and RCMP officers.

## Report on Activities

### Issue 1: Compliance with Fatalities Investigations Act

The Office responds to reportable deaths as defined by the **Fatalities Investigations Act**. The response depends upon the circumstances of death, examination of the scene, the deceased's health and the level of health care at the time of death, and witness statements. Some cases may require assistance of a Forensic Anthropologist. The focus of the Office of the Chief Medical Examiner was consistent for 2022-23.

**Objective:** By March 31, 2023, the Office of the Chief Medical Examiner will have responded to deaths that are reported in accordance with the **Fatalities Investigations Act**.

Indicators	2022-23 Results *
Conducted medical examiner file reviews	684
Ordered and/or conducted external post-mortem examinations, as appropriate	172
Ordered and/or conducted medicolegal autopsies, as appropriate	190
Recorded and reported on causes and manners of death	654

\* These numbers reflect statistics from the Government of Newfoundland and Labrador fiscal year, from April 1, 2022 to March 31, 2023, rather than the calendar year.

### Opportunities and Challenges

In 2016, the OCME underwent an operational review. The report was released in early 2017. The purpose of the review was to identify operational deficiencies, and make appropriate recommendations to correct them. As of March 31, 2023, 50 of the 65 recommendations are complete or are in progress. Outstanding recommendations continue to be addressed with the relevant parties and partners to bring to completion.

During the COVID-19 global pandemic, the operations of the OCME were able to continue as normal, with the implementation of COVID testing of deceased individuals.

During 2022-23, the OCME had two Medical Examiner vacancies. A recruitment process has been undertaken and is currently on-going to fill the vacant positions.

Through a data sharing agreement with the Public Health Agency of Canada, the OCME now has an opportunity to provide historic and real-time data on reportable deaths in the province to the federal government. This collaboration provides an opportunity to help shape policy and programming at the federal level with respect to drug and alcohol related deaths.

As part of a collaborative effort with the Provincial Clinical Genetics Program, the OCME has finalized a contract with private industry for direct cardiac genetic testing to help identify and prevent sudden cardiac deaths within the population of Newfoundland and Labrador.

At the request of the provincial health authority, the office is now in preliminary discussions to assume responsibility for non-forensic autopsy service in the metro St. John's region with a goal of quality improvement of hospital autopsy service and teaching of graduate and post-graduate medical students. This will enable the OCME to provide services and fulfil its mandate.

## 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 2023 (unaudited). The Office of the Chief Medical Examiner is not required to provide a separate audited financial statement.

### 2.3.04. OFFICE OF THE CHIEF MEDICAL EXAMINER

	Actuals \$	Estimates
		Original Budget \$
01. Salaries.....	955,818	1,051,400
Operating Accounts:		
<i>Employee Benefits</i> .....	0	3,900
<i>Transportation and Communications</i> .....	11,713	7,900
<i>Supplies</i> .....	6,027	4,700
<i>Professional Services</i> .....	249,139	330,000
<i>Purchased Services</i> .....	890,700	443,300
<i>Property, Furnishings and Equipment</i> .....	357	300
02. Operating Accounts.....	1,157,936	790,100
<b>Total: Office of the Chief Medical Examiner...</b>	<b>2,113,754</b>	<b>1,841,500</b>



## Contact us

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