

FACT SHEET 3

How a Coroner investigates a death



THIRRII

Initial stage

Once a report of a death is received by the Coroner's Office, usually from a police officer or a medical practitioner, the deceased person is taken into the care of the coroner investigating the death. The coroner will then begin their investigation.

During the initial stages of the coroner's investigation, the following steps occur:

- the senior next of kin is informed that the death has been reported to the coroner;
- an autopsy is performed, if necessary (for more information, see Fact Sheet 8: What happens after the Coronial Process, including if you wish to object to an autopsy being performed); and
- a decision is made on whether to hold an inquest.

The gathering of information stage

An investigation will vary with the circumstances of the death but usually includes:

- gathering a range of information from police, family, friends, medical practitioners, witnesses, technical experts, and any other relevant persons to assist the coroner to form a picture about what happened and why. More often than not, a coroner is able to make a written finding into a death based on this information, without having to hold an inquest;
- attending the scene of the death (if safe and appropriate to do so);
- directing that an autopsy be performed on the deceased (for more information, see Fact Sheet 9: My loved one's body and things, including if you wish to object to an autopsy being performed);
- requesting the police provide statements, reports, and information about the death; and
- conducting research and considering potential recommendations

Making a finding

A coronial finding is the formal document that a coroner writes after an investigation of a death and it is usually the last step in the investigation.

A finding usually includes:

- the identify of the deceased;
- the time and place of death;
- the cause of death; and
- the circumstances of the death.

There are two kinds of findings:

- a 'finding without an inquest', which is where a coroner makes a finding on the available information without a public hearing. Most coronial investigations end with a finding without an inquest; and
- an 'inquest finding', which is where a coroner delivers a finding after a public hearing is held. A copy of the inquest finding is published on the Department of the Attorney-General and Justice website unless a coroner orders it not to be published.

A coroner may comment on a matter, including public health or safety or the administration of justice, connected with the death being investigated.

A coroner must not, in an investigation, include a finding or comment a statement that a person is or may be guilty of an offence.

This information was last updated in December 2024 and does not constitute legal advice.



THIRRII

Working with families and communities after suicide

1800 805 801
24/7 Australia-wide

In partnership with

 NORTON ROSE FULBRIGHT