The Coroners Court in ACT

FACT SHEET 9

My loved one's body and things

THIRRILI

This fact sheet explains what happens to the body of your loved one if a medical examination is required, what you can do if you object to a medical procedure happening, and when and who can get the body when the coroner is ready to release it.

What happens to the body?

- If the body requires medical examination, the body will be transported to the ACT Forensic Medicine Centre.

Preliminary examination

- A preliminary investigation, also known as an ancillary examination, includes things like collecting fingerprints, looking inside at the teeth and inside the mouth, and taking samples of blood and urine.
- Members of the immediate family can make a request to the coroner to view the body or to be present. The coroner will consider the request and has the discretion to decline it.

Autopsy

- An autopsy is a type of medical procedure performed by a pathologist. It might also be referred to as a "post-mortem".
- An autopsy involves internal and external examinations on the body using techniques like those used in surgical operations. The chest, abdomen and skull are examined, and some organs are examined. This may involve removing the organs.
- The purpose of the autopsy is to establish the cause of death.

What can I do if I object to the autopsy?

- An immediate family member can ask the Chief Coroner to reconsider the decision of the coroner by putting the request in writing to the Chief Coroner.
- If a member of the immediate family does not want the autopsy to happen, they should tell the ACT Policing Coronial Liaison Officer their concern and put then put this in writing to the coroner (for more information, see Fact Sheet 5: Next of Kin and the Coroner's Court, including about who is considered to be a member of the immediate family).
- The coroner may take advice from the pathologist, including whether a less invasive form of examination will be enough. The coroner makes the decision whether or not the autopsy will happen. The coroner may decide that it is in the public interest or in the interests of justice for an autopsy to be done.

What is exhumation?

- If the body has already been buried and an autopsy is needed, the body may need to be removed from the ground or burial site. This is called exhumation.
- A coroner may authorise the exhumation of a body for post-mortem examination if the body is buried, or for the recovery of the ashes if the body has been cremated.

When can I get the body?

- The coroner will authorise the release of the body as soon as they can. The coroner will also issue a certificate authorising the release of the body if the coroner is satisfied that there is no reason that the body should not be buried, cremated or taken out of the ACT for burial or cremation.

What if I can't pay for the transport of the body or funeral costs?

- You may be eligible for assistance to from the ACT Government's Funeral Program to help with the costs of the funeral.

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