FACT SHEET 3

How a Coroner investigates a death

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Initial stage

- Once a report of a death is received by the Coroners Court of New South Wales, usually from the police or health and emergency professionals, the deceased person is taken into the care of the Coroners Court and a coroner will be begin their investigation.
- Usually, New South Wales Police will inform the deceased's family that the coroner will be investigating their loved one's death. A family member, or friend, will be asked by the police to formally identify their loved one's body (for more information, see Fact Sheet 5: Next of Kin and the Coroners Court).

The gathering of information stage

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

- reviewing the deceased's medical history and circumstances of the death;
- attending the scene of the death;
- conducting a post-mortem examination (for more information, see Fact Sheet 5: Next of Kin and the Coroners Court and Fact Sheet 8: My loved one's body and things);
- reviewing statements from witnesses, including family members and friends of the deceased; and
- obtaining specialist reports from experts and external investigators such as police, doctors, engineers or the fire brigade.

Based on all of the information and evidence gathered, the investigating coroner will decide if the death requires further investigation, or if the death was due to natural causes and whether an inquest is required.

The Coroners Court will communicate with the senior next of kin throughout the investigation process (for more information, see Fact Sheet 5:Next of Kin and the Coroners Court).

Making a finding

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

If the coroner has decided not to hold an inquest, the senior next of kin and other interested parties (discussed further below) will receive a letter telling them that the investigation has been finalised and what the coroner has determined as the cause and manner of death.

If an inquest has been held, the coroner will deliver a finding after the inquest has concluded. A copy of the inquest finding is published on the Coroners Court of New South Wales' website unless a coroner orders it not to be published.

A finding usually includes:

- the identity of the deceased;
- the cause of the death; and
- the circumstances of the death.

It may include recommendations that may help prevent similar deaths occurring in the future.

A coroner must not include in a finding or comment any 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.