



# **Initial steps after a death is reported to the Coroner**



## Understanding the NSW coronial jurisdiction

The NSW coronial jurisdiction serves the community through investigating circumstances and causes of death in a respectful and professional manner.

It is a very painful experience when the death of a relative or friend occurs suddenly, unexpectedly, or in traumatic circumstances.

We acknowledge that for deaths reported to the Coroner, there may be added distress in having to deal with the legal processes as well as the natural grief.

Coroners and their support staff offer you and your family our sincere condolences. We are here to provide support to you. We will treat you, and your relative in our care, with dignity and respect.

**This brochure contains information you need to know immediately after the death of your loved one is reported to the Coroner. Further information about the coronial jurisdiction is available on the Coroners Court website at [www.coroners.justice.nsw.gov.au](http://www.coroners.justice.nsw.gov.au)**



### The role of the Coroner

In Sydney, the State and senior Coroners are located at the Coroners Court at Lidcombe. In regional areas, Coroners sit as Magistrates in Local Courts around NSW.

The Coroner is required by law to investigate sudden, unexpected and unnatural deaths to determine the identity, date, place, circumstances and medical cause of death. In some cases the Coroner can make recommendations following an inquest to improve public safety and prevent future deaths.

## **Initial contact and admission**

Police report sudden, unexpected or unexplained deaths to the Coroner.

In Sydney your loved one will be taken into the care of the forensic medicine service at Lidcombe. In regional areas, your loved one will be taken into the care of the local hospital pending

a decision by the Coroner in regard to a post mortem examination.

If a post mortem examination is required your loved one will be taken into the care of either the forensic medicine service at Newcastle or Wollongong.

If you are the senior next-of-kin, coronial support staff will usually contact you within 24 hours to let you know what is happening. You may be asked to formally identify your loved one, and provide further information about the circumstances surrounding the death.

## **The role of the senior next-of-kin**

The senior next-of-kin (or their nominee) is a person confirmed as the main point of contact throughout the coronial investigation. The senior

next-of-kin is determined by law.

If you are not the senior next-of-kin and think you should be, please email the Coroners Court where the death was reported. Include in the email reasons why you think

you should have this role and proof of your relationship to the deceased (where possible).

The senior next-of-kin is advised of the types of medical examinations or tests that are required. When these are completed your loved one will be released into the care of the funeral director nominated by the senior next-of-kin. The senior next-of-kin is also assisted and supported by specialist social workers throughout this initial admission process.

## **Examinations that may be ordered by the Coroner**

All deaths reported to the Coroner are reviewed by specialist forensic medicine and investigative teams. These teams gather medical and other information about your loved one to avoid unnecessary examinations or transfers, particularly in regional areas.

The role of the team is to gather as much evidence as is necessary to enable the Coroner to determine the cause of death using the least invasive method. This evidence can involve any of the following types of examination: a review of the medical records, computed tomography (CT) scanning, blood toxicology testing, an external examination, a coronial post mortem examination, or a combination of any of these.

The majority of examinations ordered by the Coroner are minimally invasive. In some cases where the cause of death cannot be found, a coronial post mortem is required. A coronial post mortem is performed by a highly specialised forensic pathologist. It is similar to a surgical operation and includes examination of internal organs.

**When deciding the type of examination required, the religious and cultural needs of the family will be considered. The senior next-of-kin will be informed before any examination commences and they will have an opportunity to object.**

**If there is an objection, senior next-of-kin are requested to inform the Coroner (at the court to which the death was reported) by email as soon as possible.**

### **Objection to a post mortem examination**

The senior next-of-kin can formally object to a post mortem examination by sending written advice by email to the Coroner stating their reasons for the objection.

If the Coroner decides a post mortem is still required after considering the written reasons, notice will be sent to the senior

next-of-kin advising they have 48 hours to apply to the Supreme Court for an order preventing the post mortem. Legal assistance may be needed to make a Supreme Court application. Senior next-of-kin are requested to inform coronial support staff immediately if they do not wish to proceed to the Supreme Court.

### **Organ retention and tissue samples**

As part of the post mortem process, tissue samples may be collected to determine the cause of death. In a small number of cases, organs may need to be retained for more testing. If this is required a coronial support officer will contact the senior next-of-kin to obtain their consent.

If the senior next-of-kin objects to the organ retention they will need to send their objection by email to the Coroner. If the Coroner still determines the organs need to be retained, notice will be sent to the senior next-of-kin advising they have 48 hours to apply to the Supreme Court for an order preventing retention of the organ.

### **Support services**

Specialist social workers are available through the forensic medicine service to assist you and your family with emotional and practical support.



Counsellors can help you with a range of things such as:

- speaking with your family doctor, school or workplace
- understanding the coronial process, reports and timeframes
- a referral to other support or local counselling services.

You may want to view your relative or friend who has died. This is usually arranged with your funeral director, however viewing can be done at one of the specialist forensic medicine facilities at Sydney (Lidcombe), Newcastle or Wollongong.

### **Personal possessions**

Personal possessions, such as mobile phones, jewellery and other valuables are generally collected by police at the place of death and returned to the senior next-of-kin later. Occasionally, police may keep some items for forensic examination.

Any personal possessions with your loved one when they are admitted into our care are given to your nominated funeral director when your loved one is taken into their care.

**Any enquiries concerning your loved one's property should be directed to the police officer who reported the death to the Coroner.**





# Planning the funeral

**You can contact the funeral director of your choice at any time to start planning the funeral. However, do not set a date for the funeral until you receive confirmation of the date your loved one is able to be released from our care.**

Medical examinations and testing are usually carried out within three days (excluding weekends) of your loved one being admitted into our care. In more complex cases this can be longer.

If your loved one died in regional NSW, coronial support staff will arrange transport of your loved one, with our contracted provider, to your chosen funeral home in regional NSW.

## Obtaining a death certificate

Death certificates are issued by the NSW Registry of Births Deaths and Marriages. An interim certificate can be issued even though the Coroner has not yet determined the cause of death.

Your funeral director completes all the paperwork and registers the death with the NSW Registry of Births Deaths and Marriages.

If the Coroner has not determined the cause of death in the initial stages, an interim certificate can be issued on request. Once the cause of death is determined by the Coroner, please return the interim certificate and the NSW Registry of Births Deaths and Marriages will issue a standard death certificate.

In some circumstances organisations such as banks, real estate agents, or Centrelink will accept a confirmation of death letter issued by coronial support staff. If you require this document, please email your request to the Coroners Court where the death was reported.

# HELPFUL CONTACTS

## **Coroners Court Lidcombe**

1A Main Avenue,  
Lidcombe 2141

T: (02) 8584 7777

E: [Lidcombe.coroners@justice.nsw.gov.au](mailto:Lidcombe.coroners@justice.nsw.gov.au)  
<https://coroners.nsw.gov.au/>

## **Local Courts in regional NSW**

<https://localcourt.nsw.gov.au/cl-2.html>

## **NSW Health Pathology Forensic Medicine Service**

### **Newcastle**

T: (02) 4935 9700

### **Sydney (Lidcombe)**

(02) 9563 9000

### **Wollongong**

T: (02) 4222 5466

<https://pathology.health.nsw.gov.au/>

## **NSW Registry of Births Deaths and Marriages**

T: 13 77 88

[www.nsw.gov.au/departments-and-agencies/births-deaths-marriages](http://www.nsw.gov.au/departments-and-agencies/births-deaths-marriages)

## **Legal Aid Coronial Inquest Unit**

T: (02) 9219 5000

<https://www.legalaid.nsw.gov.au/my-problem-is-about-someone-who-died/coronial-inquests/coronial-inquest-unit>

## **Centrelink Bereavement**

T: 13 23 00

<https://www.servicesaustralia.gov.au/what-to-do-when-someone-dies?>

## **Translating and Interpreting Service**

T: 13 14 50

## **NSW Mental Health Line**

T: 1800 011 511 (24hrs)

## **Lifeline**

T: 13 11 14 (24hrs)

## **Support after Suicide**

<https://www.supportaftersuicide.org.au/>