

# THE CORONERS COURT AND THE KOORI COMMUNITY

## Acknowledgement

The Coroners Court of Victoria acknowledges Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people as the Traditional Custodians of the land. The Coroners Court also acknowledges and pays respect to the Elders, past and present.

## What do I do now? The first steps in the coronial process

This short brochure explains the things you need to know immediately after the death of a loved one is reported to the coroner.

For further information contact **Coronial Admissions and Enquiries (CA&E) on 1300 309 519** or visit the Coroners Court of Victoria website at [www.coronerscourt.vic.gov.au](http://www.coronerscourt.vic.gov.au)

## The role of the coroner

The coroner investigates certain deaths and tries to find out their cause. They do not investigate all deaths, only deaths which are reportable, which include:

- those that are unexpected, violent, not from natural causes or arise from accident or injury
- those that happen unexpectedly during or following a medical procedure
- those that happen when the person who died was in 'custody or care'
- when a doctor is not able to sign a death certificate
- when the identity of the person is not known

## Initial contact

CA&E staff will get in touch with you about the first steps of the coronial process.

The CA&E is a state-wide 24-hour service provided by the Victorian Institute of Forensic Medicine. The role of the CA&E is to:

- receive reports of deaths
- admit people into the care of the coronial jurisdiction
- release people from the care of the coronial jurisdiction for the funeral service
- coordinate the identification process
- coordinate the medical investigation into a death on behalf of the coroner.

## Admission into care

In most cases, if your loved one died in Melbourne, he or she will be taken into the care of the CA&E at the State Coronial Services Centre at 65 Kavanagh Street, Southbank.

If your loved one died in regional Victoria, CA&E staff will get in touch with you and tell you where he or she is being cared for.

CA&E staff will assist you if you wish to see or spend time with your loved one and will talk to you about who will be the 'senior next of kin'.

The 'senior next of kin' is determined by the coroner and any ongoing communication about the coronial investigation will be made through that person or their nominated representative.

## Identification

The coroner must confirm the identity of the person who has died. This may involve a visual or medical and scientific process.

In circumstances where a visual identification is required, you may be asked to identify your loved one. To identify a loved one you must be a family member or someone who knew the person well at the time of their death.

Medical or scientific methods of identification may include the use of dental records, fingerprinting or DNA comparisons.

The coroner will determine the most appropriate method of identification and CA&E staff will inform you of the identification process that will be required for your loved one.

## Medical examinations

Medical examinations are carried out to help the coroner determine the cause of a person's death. Even if it seems obvious, it is very important that the coroner is able to investigate exactly what happened.

## Preliminary examination

Once your loved one is in the care of the coronial jurisdiction, a pathologist will examine him or her. This preliminary examination is minimally invasive.

CA&E staff work closely with pathologists and will answer any questions you may have.

CA&E staff may also ask you for information to help obtain your loved one's medical records or other information and they may need to talk to you about the circumstances surrounding the death.

The police may also contact you to discuss the death. They help the coroner gather as many facts surrounding the death as possible.

## Autopsy

In some cases, an autopsy will need to be performed. This is a medical procedure performed by a pathologist that aims to determine the medical cause of the death.

If a coroner believes that an autopsy is necessary, CA&E staff will contact the 'senior next of kin' first to explain the process and answer any questions. If you intend to object to an autopsy occurring, for example because of religious, cultural or other reasons, please let CA&E staff know at this time so that they can inform the coroner.

The coroner will take your concerns into account and CA&E staff will contact you again to let you know their decision.

For further information about medical examinations contact **1300 309 519** and ask to speak to a CA&E staff member.

## Personal possessions

Personal possessions – such as jewellery, clothing and other valuables – are generally retained by the police at the place of death and then returned. Occasionally, the police may keep some items for forensic examination.

Otherwise all personal items are given to the funeral director to be returned. If you have questions about personal possession please let the CA&E know.

## Planning the funeral

You can make contact with a funeral director at any time. The funeral director will liaise with you and the CA&E staff and help you to plan the funeral.

If your loved one died in regional Victoria the CA&E will arrange for our contracted provider, St John Ambulance to have your loved one repatriated to your chosen funeral home in regional Victoria.

## Obtaining a death certificate

The coroner provides the Registrar of Births Deaths and Marriages with information about the cause of death so the death can be registered and a death certificate issued.

## Standard death certificate

You or your funeral director can order a standard death certificate. The Registry of Births, Deaths and Marriages will mail the certificate either to yourself or to a person you have nominated after all the particulars of the death have been registered.

A standard death certificate is commonly required for financial and other official purposes as proof of the death.

## Interim death certificate

In matters where the coroner has not yet established the cause of a death, the Registry of Births Deaths and Marriages can issue an interim death certificate.

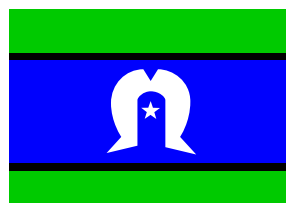
However, as an interim death certificate does not specify the cause of the death, it may not be accepted for all official purposes.

Staff from the Coroners Court of Victoria and CA&E may also provide provide a Confirmation of Death letter confirming that a death has occurred. This letter is not accepted by all financial and or legal institutions for official purposes.

It is always best to check with the organisation you are dealing with as to whether they will accept an interim death certificate.

## Help in a difficult time

Staff from the Coroners Court of Victoria and the CA&E can assist families by providing referral information for agencies who may assist with your grief and loss. Please refer to the back page of this brochure for a list of helpful contact numbers for agencies who offer a range of support services for people during this difficult time.



### Coronial Admissions and Enquiries

65 Kavanagh Street Southbank 3006  
 T 1300 309 519 F 03 9682 1206  
 W www.coronerscourt.vic.gov.au

## Family Liaison Officers

The Coroners Court of Victoria employ family liaison officers to help families navigate the Coroners Court and provide additional support during the coronial process. This includes delivering sensitive information on behalf of coroners, helping families understand information contained within a coronial brief and providing support during court proceedings.

Family Liaison Officers may also assist families and witnesses by providing referral information and advice for external counselling and support who can assist with your grief and loss experience during this difficult time.

The Family Liaison Officers can be contacted on  
**1300 309 519**

## Victorian Aboriginal Funeral Service

The Victorian Aboriginal Funeral Services is currently operated through the Aborigines Advancement League.

The funeral service provides advice and information on the procedures of a funeral service, coronial matters and transportation of loved ones.

### Aborigines Advancement League

2 Watt Street, Thornbury VIC 3071  
**(03) 9480 7777**

## Community Support Services

In Victoria there are a number of Aboriginal corporations who provide a number of health and social services often with dedicated social and emotional wellbeing teams.

The Coroners support services team can assist you in finding suitable support services or getting in touch with your local co-op.

### Mungabareena Aboriginal Corporation

21 Hovell St, Wodonga VIC 3690  
**(02) 6024 7599**

### Albury Wodonga Aboriginal Health Service

644 Daniel St, Glenroy NSW 2640  
**(02) 6040 1200**

### Rumbalara Aboriginal Co Op Ltd

89 Drummond Rd, Shepparton VIC 3630  
**(03) 5822 0000**

### Njernda Medical Centre

84 Hare St, Echuca VIC 3564  
**(03) 5480 6252**

### Mallee District Aboriginal Services

120 Madden Ave, Mildura VIC 3500  
**(03) 5018 4100**

### Swan Hill Office

70 Nyah road, Swan Hill VIC 3585  
**(03) 5018 4100**

### Kerang Office

8 Nolan Street Kerang  
**(03) 5450 3019**

### Robinvale Office

1 McLennan Drive, Robinvale  
**(03) 5026 1848**

### Goolum Goolum Aboriginal Corporation

43 Hamilton St, Horsham VIC 3400  
**(03) 5381 6333**

### Winda-Mara Aboriginal Corporation

21 Scott St, Heywood VIC 3304  
**(03) 5527 0000**

### Gunditjmara Aboriginal Co-Op Ltd

135 Kepler St, Warrnambool VIC 3280  
**(03) 5559 1234**

### Wathaurong Aboriginal Co-op

62 Morgan St, North Geelong VIC 3215  
**(03) 5277 0044**

### Aborigines Advancement League Inc

2 Watt St, Thornbury VIC 3071  
**(03) 9480 7777**

### Victorian Aboriginal Health Service

186 Nicholson St, Fitzroy VIC 3065  
**(03) 9419 3000**

### Bunurong Health Services

3 Carroll Avenue, Dandenong VIC 3175  
**(03) 9794 5933**

### Ramahyuck District Aboriginal Corporation

Borella Rd, Sale VIC 3850  
**(03) 5143 1644**

### Gippsland and East Gippsland Aboriginal Co-Operative

37-53 Dalmahoy Street, Bairnsdale VIC 3875  
**(03) 5150 0700**

### Ballarat and District Aboriginal Co-operative

5 Market St Ballarat VIC 3353  
 PO Box 643 Ballarat VIC 3353  
**(03) 5331 5344**

### Bendigo & District Aboriginal Co-Operative

13 Forest St, Bendigo VIC 3550  
**(03) 5442 4947**

### ARTWORK acknowledgment:

Title: Striving for a better tomorrow.  
 Acknowledgement: This artwork, titled Striving For A Better Tomorrow, is reproduced with the permission of the artist, Mr Dixon Patten. Mr Patten is a traditional descendant from the Gunnai and Yorta Yorta peoples.

## Helpful contact numbers

(Business hours unless otherwise stated)

Australian Centre for Grief and Bereavement **9265 2111**

Compassionate Friends Victoria-24 hr Country Vic **98884944**  
**1800 641 091**

Federation of Community Legal Centres **96 52 1500**

Kids Helpline - 24 hr telephone counselling for 5-25 yrs **1800 55 1800**

Lifeline-crisis support 24hr **13 11 14**

Mensline **1300 78 99 78**

Mercy Grief Services-counselling **9364 9838**

National Relay Service - TTY Service - Speak & Listen **133 677**  
**1300 555 727**

Road Trauma Support Team -24hr **1300 367 797**

Registry of Births, Deaths and Marriages **1300 369 367**

SIDS and Kids Victoria - 24 hr bereavement line **1300 308 307**

State Trustees Country Vic **9667 6319**  
**1300 138 672**

Suicide Helpline - 24 hr **1300 651 251**

Support After Suicide **9421 7640**

Translating and Interpreter Service **131 450**

Transport Accident Commission **1300 654 329**

Victims Support Agency **1800 819 817**

Victoria Legal Aid **9269 0234**

Victorian Aboriginal Legal Services **1800 064 865**

Victorian Court Information and Welfare Network - court process support **1800 681 614**