



Coroners Court
of Victoria

— What happens now? —

First steps in the coronial process

This brochure explains the things you need to know immediately after the death of a loved one is reported to the coroner, including the help that is available and what the coroner will do in the initial stages of the coronial process.

Help in a difficult time

Staff from the Coroners Court of Victoria (the Court) and Coronial Admissions and Enquiries (CA&E) can give you information and referrals for services that may help with your grief and loss. The back page of this brochure has a list of helpful contacts for a range of support services that may be useful during this difficult time.

Role of the coroner



The coroner must find, if possible:

1. the identity of the person who has died
2. the cause of the death
3. in some cases, the circumstances surrounding the death.

Coroners do not investigate all deaths, only deaths that are “reportable”. Reportable deaths include:

- those that are unexpected, unnatural or violent, or caused by an accident or injury
- those that happen unexpectedly during or after 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.

First contact

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

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

The role of CA&E is to:

- receive reports of deaths
- take a person’s body into the care of CA&E
- coordinate identifying the person who has died
- coordinate the medical investigation into a death for the coroner
- release a person’s body for the funeral.

Admission into care

In most cases, if your loved one died in Melbourne, they will be taken into the care of CA&E at the Coronial Services Centre, 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 they are being cared for.

CA&E staff will help if you want to see or spend time with your loved one and will talk to you about who will be the senior next of kin. Any communication about the coronial investigation will be made through that person or their chosen representative.

Senior next of kin

The senior next of kin is usually the person's spouse or domestic partner. If the person does not have a partner, or they are not available, then the senior next of kin will be (in this order):

- an adult son or daughter (18 years and over)
- a parent
- an adult brother or sister (18 years and over)
- a person named in the will as an executor
- a person who, just before the death, was a personal representative of the person who has died
- a person that the coroner decides to be the senior next of kin because of their close relationship with the person who has died just before their death.

Identification

The coroner needs to confirm the identity of the person who has died. This can include visual or medical and scientific identification methods.

If visual identification is needed, you may be asked to come to the Coronial Services Centre 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. CA&E staff will schedule a viewing appointment for you during office hours.

Medical or scientific methods of identification include using dental records, fingerprinting or DNA comparisons. The coroner will decide the most appropriate method of identification and CA&E staff will let you know the process that will be used.

Medical examinations

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

Preliminary examination

Once your loved one is in the care of CA&E, a forensic pathologist will examine them. This preliminary examination is minimally invasive. CA&E staff work closely with the forensic pathologist and can answer any questions you have.

CA&E staff may ask you for help to get your loved one's medical records or other information. They may also need to talk to you about the circumstances surrounding the death. The police may also contact you to discuss the death. This helps the coroner to gather as many facts surrounding the death as possible.

Autopsy

In some cases, the forensic pathologist will need to perform an autopsy. This is a medical procedure that aims to work out the medical cause of death. If a coroner believes that an autopsy is needed, CA&E staff will first contact the senior next of kin to explain the process and answer any questions.

If you want to object to an autopsy being performed – for example, because of religious or cultural reasons – please let CA&E staff know so that they can let the coroner know. The coroner will take your concerns into account and CA&E staff will contact you again to let you know the coroner's decision.

Personal possessions

The police generally keep personal possessions, such as jewellery, clothing and other valuables, found at the place of death and then give them to the funeral director. Occasionally, the police may keep some items for forensic examination.

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

Planning the funeral

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

The funeral director can arrange to have your loved one transferred to regional Victoria if needed.

Getting a death certificate

The coroner and funeral director provide the Registry of Births, Deaths & Marriages Victoria (BDM) with important information following a death. The coroner must provide details about the cause of death before BDM can issue a standard death certificate.

Standard death certificate

You or your funeral director can order a standard death certificate. There is a fee, which may be included as part of the funeral costs. BDM will issue the death certificate to the person who the funeral director listed. You can apply directly to BDM for a copy of the death certificate if you were not the one making the funeral arrangements.

Interim death certificate

If the coroner has not yet established the cause of death, BDM can issue an interim death certificate. However, as an interim death certificate does not include the cause of death, it may not be accepted for all official purposes.

Staff from the Court and CA&E can also give you a “confirmation of death” letter confirming that there has been a death. This letter is not accepted by all financial or legal institutions for official purposes.

It is always best to check with the organisation you are dealing with to see if they will accept an interim death certificate or a confirmation of death letter.

Helpful contacts

If you have any questions about the initial stages of a coronial investigation, you can contact CA&E on 1300 309 519 (24 hours) or visit the Court's website www.coronerscourt.vic.gov.au.

Additional support services that may help during this difficult time are listed below. The numbers are available during business hours, unless otherwise stated.

Australian Centre for Grief and Bereavement	(03) 9265 2100
Compassionate Friends	(03) 9888 4944 (24 hours) 1300 064 068 (24 hours)
Donor Tissue Bank of Victoria	(03) 9684 4444
Federation of Community Legal Centres Victoria	(03) 9652 1500
Interpreter Service	13 14 50
GriefLine	1300 845 745 (12pm–3am)
Lifeline	13 11 14 (24 hours)
Mercy Grief Services (Western Metropolitan Region only)	(03) 9313 5700
National Relay Service TTY	13 36 77 (for hearing impaired) 1300 555 727 (speak and listen)
Registry of Births, Deaths and Marriages Victoria	1300 369 367
Road Trauma Support Services	1300 367 797
Red Nose (formerly SIDS and Kids)	1300 308 307 (24 hours)
State Trustees	(03) 9667 6444 1300 138 672 (country areas)
SuicideLine Victoria	1300 651 251 (24 hours)
Support After Suicide	(03) 9421 7640
StandBy Suicide Support (Murray Region only)	0439 173 310 (24 hours)
Victims of Crime Helpline	1800 819 817
Victoria Legal Aid	1300 792 387
Victorian Aboriginal Legal Services	1800 064 865
Court Network (Court Process Support)	1800 681 614

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