

Our Ref: AP:230207  
Your Ref: 2022 004773

28 November 2025

Mr George Carrington  
Coroner's Solicitor  
Coroners Court of Victoria

Dear Mr Carrington

## Investigation into the death of Michael James Batten

I refer to your letter to Northern Health dated 15 April 2025 enclosing the findings of Her Honour Coroner Catherine Fitzgerald dated 4 March 2025 into the death of Michael Batten ('Findings').

Northern Health is grateful for the opportunity to respond to Her Honour's Findings and I provide the following information on behalf of Northern Health.

Northern Health confirms Her Honour's comments that the transoesophageal echocardiogram (**TOE**) in this case was postponed due to exceptional circumstances and disruptions caused by COVID-19. The TOE procedure is an aerosol generating procedure meaning it fell into the category of procedures that were not being undertaken due to the risk of COVID-19 transmission.

I confirm that two additional TOE specialists have been appointed and since August 2022 and Northern Health has capacity to perform TOE investigations five days per week.

### Recommendation 1

*I recommend that NH update its 'Cardiology Checklist' document to ensure that required follow up appointments are scheduled by the responsible clinician/team*

Northern Health accepts this recommendation and confirms it will take steps to implement the same.

### Recommendation 2

*I recommend that NH review its Cardiology policies and procedures, to ensure sufficient clarity regarding which clinician/team is responsible for scheduling follow up appointments with patients who undergo a diagnostic procedure, following referral from a Cardiologist.*

Northern Health acknowledges Her Honour's recommendation and confirms it will take steps to review its cardiology policies and procedures regarding the arrangement of follow-up appointments.

However, Northern Health would like to clarify that the current practice for arranging follow-up appointments is for the referring cardiologist to schedule it at the same time the test is ordered. This is already standard practice across the cardiology department although unfortunately, did not occur in Mr Batten's case.

By way of example of current practices, when a patient is seen at Northern Health's Chest Pain Evaluation Unit (CPEU) and there is a cardiac cause of their pain (or otherwise), an automatic follow up telehealth appointment is made for the patient four weeks after their initial appointment. For our cardiologists in Rapid Access Chest Pain clinic, one week of their schedule is reserved for new patients and the second week is reserved for follow-up appointments. And in circumstances of a ward-based or any other internal or external referral, any referrals older than four weeks are reviewed by a dedicated cardiologist, and subsequently scheduled on the responsible cardiologist's list.

Notwithstanding, Northern Health confirms it will review its cardiology policies and procedures to ensure the responsibility for follow up appointments is clear.

On behalf of Northern Health, I offer my condolences to Mr Batten's family and friends.

Yours faithfully



**Professor William Van Gaal**  
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**Director of Cardiology**  
**Divisional Director of Emergency Services**