



IN THE CORONERS COURT
OF VICTORIA
AT MELBOURNE

Court Reference: COR 2025 002564

FINDING INTO DEATH WITH INQUEST

Form 37 Rule 63(1)

*Section 67 of the **Coroners Act 2008***

Deceased:	Getahun Mebrahtom Zigta
Delivered on:	14 September 2026
Delivered at:	Coroners Court of Victoria, 65 Kavanagh Street, Southbank
Hearing date:	31 August 2026
Findings of:	Coroner Sarah Gebert
Counsel assisting the coroner:	Emily Sandrussi, Coroner's Solicitor
Key words:	<i>Hit and run (pedestrian), motor vehicle collision</i>

INTRODUCTION

1. On 12 May 2025, Getahun Mebrahtom Zigta was 34 years old when he died in hospital from injuries sustained in a motor vehicle collision. At the time of his death, Getahun was of no fixed address.

THE CORONIAL INVESTIGATION

2. Getahun's death was reported to the coroner as it fell within the definition of a reportable death in the *Coroners Act 2008* (**the Act**). Reportable deaths include deaths that are unexpected, unnatural or violent or result from accident or injury.
3. The role of a coroner is to independently investigate reportable deaths to establish, if possible, identity, medical cause of death, and surrounding circumstances. Surrounding circumstances are limited to events which are sufficiently proximate and causally related to the death.
4. Under the Act, coroners also have the important functions of helping to prevent deaths and promoting public health and safety and the administration of justice through the making of comments or recommendations in appropriate cases about any matter connected to the death under investigation.
5. In the coronial jurisdiction, the standard of proof applicable to findings is the balance of probabilities.¹

Mandatory inquest

6. An inquest into Getahun's death was mandatory as the death appeared to be the result of a potential homicide related to the driving incident which caused Getahun's death.²
7. The Act does provide for certain exceptions including where a person has been charged with an indictable offence in respect of the death being investigated by the coroner, however in this case no one has been charged in relation to the death.

¹ Subject to the principles enunciated in *Briginshaw v Briginshaw* (1938) 60 CLR 336. The effect of this and similar authorities is that coroners should not make adverse findings against, or comments about, individuals unless the evidence provides a comfortable level of satisfaction as to those matters taking into account the consequences of such findings or comments.

² Section 52(2)(a) of the Act.

Sources of evidence

8. As part of the coronial investigation, Coroner's Investigator Detective Leading Senior Constable Brandon Levin (**DLSC Levin**) prepared a comprehensive coronial brief, comprising statements from witnesses including the forensic pathologist who examined Getahun and investigating police officers, as well as DLSC Levin, other investigative material such as video footage (body worn camera, CCTV and dashcam) and emergency call recordings. Other documents on the coronial file include Getahun's medical records and the e-medical deposition from the Royal Melbourne Hospital.
9. The inquest heard evidence from Detective Leading Senior Constable Levin. Getahun's family residing in Ethiopia were advised of the hearing and members of his extended family were present at the hearing.
10. This finding is based on the entirety of the investigation material. All this material, together with the inquest transcript, will remain on the coronial file and comprises my investigation into Getahun's death. In writing this finding, I do not purport to summarise all the material and evidence but will only refer to it in such detail as is warranted by its forensic significance and the interests of narrative clarity.

BACKGROUND

11. Getahun was described as a quiet and private person who kept his emotions "in his heart". He enjoyed Tigrayan music and was of Christian Orthodox faith. Getahun is survived by his father, sister and brother, all of whom live in Ethiopia.
12. Getahun grew up in Ethiopia, where he met his former wife when they were teenagers. They were married in 2015, and in 2017 the couple immigrated to South Australia where they lived together until 2018. Getahun subsequently lived in a share house for a time and then started sleeping rough. Getahun and his wife divorced in 2021.
13. At the time of his death, Getahun was out of work and had been sleeping rough for several years. Between January and March 2025, he had contact with Victoria Police on six occasions in the context of homelessness. On four of those occasions, he accepted referrals to support services.

CIRCUMSTANCES IN WHICH THE DEATH OCCURRED

14. At about 2.30am on 8 May 2025, Getahun attended a 7/11 service station on Hopkins Road, Deanside and purchased various items including a can of Coca-Cola, a chocolate bar and a coffee.
15. At about 7.00am, shortly before sunrise, a passing motorist observed a person, later identified as Getahun, lying on the shoulder of the road on the southern side of the Western Freeway at Cobblebank, about 100 metres northwest of the Mount Cottrell Road junction. The 7/11 service station was approximately 9km south-east of where Getahun was located.
16. The motorist was unsure whether Getahun was alive and called emergency services to request a welfare check.
17. The Western Freeway at this location was a two-way, four-lane divided road with two lanes in each direction. The road ran generally northwest to southeast.
18. At the place where Getahun was located, there were three northwest-bound lanes, with the third lane formed by the Mount Cottrell Road on ramp to allow vehicles to merge into the general flow of traffic. The opposing lanes of traffic were divided by a wide grassed median, and adjacent lanes were separated by broken white painted lines. The Mount Cottrell Road on ramp was separated from the main carriageway by a single solid white line.
19. The outer edges of the northwest-bound lanes were marked by white painted fog lines, which separated the traffic lanes from narrow bitumen shoulders. The southern side of the road was bordered by a wide gravel shoulder. Wire rope barriers separated the shoulder from open paddocks to the south and the grassed median to the north.
20. The Western Freeway in this area was mostly straight and flat with gentle undulation. Both northwest bound lanes are approximately 3.3 metres wide and the Mount Cottrell Road on ramp narrows as it merges. The road surface was in good condition with no visible damage or defects that would have caused or contributed to a collision. There were overhead streetlights at the intersection with Mount Cottrell Road further to the east, but none at the location where Getahun was located. The posted speed limit was

90 kilometres per hour and transitioned to 110 kilometres per hour slightly further down the road.

21. Mount Cottrell Road south of the Western Freeway ran generally north to south with a single paved lane in each direction. The opposing lanes of traffic were separated by broken white painted lines. The road was bordered by residential housing to the east and open paddocks to the west. The posted speed limit approaching the Western Freeway on ramp was 80 kilometres per hour.
22. Victoria Police responded to the request for a welfare check, arriving at about 7.05am. First Constables James Delnegro and Courtney Sneddon of Melton Uniform were the members who attended. They observed Getahun lying on his back on the side of the road with significant injuries to his head. He was in and out of consciousness and his breathing was shallow. His belongings were scattered across the shoulder of the road.
23. Police flagged down a passing ambulance for assistance. Two further ambulance units also attended. Paramedics assessed Getahun's injuries as critical and loaded him into an ambulance for transport to the Royal Melbourne Hospital.
24. At about 8.42am, Getahun arrived at the Royal Melbourne Hospital where he was treated for extensive head injuries. He underwent surgery but his injuries were determined to be unsurvivable. Getahun was stabilised and admitted to the critical care unit so that he could be identified and his family contacted.
25. Getahun's ex-wife and a community leader attended the hospital over the coming days. During this time, Getahun was cared for by the local Ethiopian community and attended to by an Orthodox priest.
26. At about 2.00pm on 12 May 2025, Getahun was extubated with his ex-wife by his side. He died at 2.30pm.

IDENTITY OF THE DECEASED

27. On 12 May 2025, Getahun Mebrahtom Zigta, born 22 October 1990, was visually identified by his ex-wife, Danite Haile, who signed a formal Statement of Identification to this effect.

28. Identity is not in dispute and requires no further investigation.

MEDICAL CAUSE OF DEATH

29. Senior Forensic Pathologist, Dr Michael Burke, from the Victorian Institute of Forensic Medicine (VIFM), conducted an autopsy on 14 May 2025 and provided a written report of his findings dated 4 August 2025.
30. The post-mortem examination revealed significant head injury including skull fractures, acute subdural haemorrhage, and brain swelling, and bruising.
31. A localised bruise about 25cm wide was identified on the back outer side of Getahun's left upper thigh. Localised bruising was also identified on his right lower leg. No significant bruising was identified on his back. A post-mortem computed tomography (CT) scan did not demonstrate any lower limb or pelvic fractures.
32. The external examination revealed linear abrasions to the chest and abdomen and a laceration to the left forehead. Dr Burke explained the abrasions indicated Getahun was propelled forward onto the roadway by an impact from behind, rather than an assault.
33. Dr Burke noted the absence of glass, mirror fragments, pieces of plastic or other trace evidence from a car on the road where Getahun was found.
34. Given these features, and the relatively localised transverse bruise to the back of Getahun's left thigh, Dr Burke considered it reasonable to suggest Getahun had been struck from behind by a vehicle with a presenting feature causing the localised bruise, such as a 'bull bar' from a SUV or light truck.
35. Routine toxicological analysis of ante-mortem samples (collected at 9.10am on 8 May 2025, shortly after Getahun's hospital admission) detected therapeutic medications and no alcohol.
36. Dr Burke provided an opinion that the medical cause of death was "*1(a) Head injury (pedestrian)*".
37. I accept Dr Burke's opinion.

POLICE INVESTIGATION

Collision reconstruction

38. On 8 May 2025, Detective Sergeant Janelle Hardiman (**D/S Hardiman**) of the Victoria Police Forensic Services Department examined the location at which Getahun was found. She provided a statement setting out her analysis dated 23 May 2025.
39. Forensic analysis indicated Getahun had injuries to his head, chest and lower right leg consistent with having been impacted by a vehicle and sliding along the gravel shoulder. Based on the nature of the injury to Getahun's right leg, D/S Hardiman considered that it may have been caused by impact with a vehicle travelling less than the signposted 90 kilometres per hour, a side-swipe type impact, or both.
40. D/S Hardiman determined an area of impact very near to the white fog line dividing the Mount Cottrell Road on ramp and the gravel shoulder, about 32.9 meters from the point at which Getahun came to rest. She calculated the vehicle was likely travelling 70 to 74 kilometres per hour at impact.
41. Given the absence of vehicle debris at the scene, D/S Hardiman considered it was more likely that Getahun was impacted by either a truck or a four-wheel drive type vehicle.
42. D/S Hardiman concluded,

In my opinion, the pedestrian was walking northwest along the Western Freeway, Cobblebank, when he was impacted by a vehicle. At impact, the pedestrian was near to the fog line dividing the Mount Cottrell Road on ramp and the road shoulder. The pedestrian was either projected forward by a vehicle travelling less than the speed limit or alternatively was impacted in a side sweep type impact. It is more likely that the pedestrian was impacted by either a truck or a four wheel drive type vehicle. At impact the impacting vehicle was travelling at a minimum of 70 kilometres an hour.

43. Based on their assessment of the scene, investigating police determined it most probable that Getahun was struck by a vehicle merging onto the Western Freeway from Mount Cottrell Road.

First media appeal

44. On the afternoon of 8 May 2025, police made a media appeal for witnesses. In response, a member of the public provided police with dashcam footage that depicted Getahun walking northwest along the southern shoulder of the Western Freeway, about 266 metres south of the collision scene, at 5.42am.
45. Waste removal company JJ Richards & Sons also provided police with dashcam footage from 16 of their trucks which travelled past the collision scene between 5.43am and 7.10am. On review of this footage, investigators determined that the collision occurred between 5.52am and 5.54am.

CCTV canvassing and Automatic Number Plate Recognition

46. Police investigators canvassed residences on Mount Cottrell Road south of the Western Freeway and secured CCTV footage depicting north-bound traffic travelling towards the Western Freeway. Analysis of this footage established that seven vehicles travelled north on Mount Cottrell Road within the relevant timeframe. The quality of the footage was insufficient to identify the make and model of the vehicles, but police were able to establish body shape of the vehicles and whether each one was light or dark in colour as follows:
 - (a) Vehicles 1 and 2 were unknown dark coloured cars;
 - (b) Vehicle 3 was an unknown light-coloured SUV or 4x4 utility;
 - (c) Vehicle 4 was an unknown medium sized car;
 - (d) Vehicle 5 was later identified as a Hyundai Palisade and investigated further;
 - (e) Vehicle 6 was an unknown dark coloured car; and
 - (f) Vehicle 7 was later identified as a Toyota Fortuna and investigated further.
47. Police investigators used Automatic Number Plate Recognition (**ANPR**) operations to establish pattern of life and commuting tendencies, which assisted in identifying two of the seven vehicles captured in the Mount Cottrell Road CCTV footage. The two cars identified were a Hyundai Palisade and Toyota Fortuna.

48. Police interviewed the registered owners of each of the identified vehicles and inspected the cars for signs of damage or recent repair. The Hyundai Palisade showed no signs of damage, recent repair, or anything else to suggest it had been involved in a collision. The Toyota Fortuna did show signs of recent repair, but this was separately accounted for. Further investigation into the car and its registered owner did not disclose any evidence of involvement in the collision.
49. Police also attended and inspected a number of other vehicles identified with the aid of ANPR data but were unable to identify the vehicle involved in the collision.
50. Police investigators canvassed further west of the collision site for CCTV, securing footage from the Melton Entertainment Park. However, this footage was too far from the Western Freeway to be of any investigative value.

Second media appeal

51. On 13 June 2025, police conducted a second media appeal for witnesses, but this was of no investigative value.

Evidence at Inquest

52. The Coroner's Investigator, DLSC Levin gave evidence at the Inquest. He detailed the investigations conducted to date and clarified that police remain unable to identify the vehicle that struck Getahun having exhausted all reasonable avenues for investigation.
53. As to whether the driver of the vehicle who struck Getahun would have been aware of the collision, DLSC Levin considered that this would depend on the type of vehicle involved. For example, if it was a small to large truck, he stated,

it's entirely possible that that person would have no knowledge at all, especially given the layout of where the collision has taken place. ... , that person is merging onto the western freeway, it's very hard to know what that person was thinking or seeing or doing, however, there's absolutely a time where their attention would be focused ... - to their right, which would be the oncoming traffic. In that circumstance, Getahun would've been on their left.

54. However, if it were a smaller type of vehicle, he assumed that a significant level of impact would have been felt.
55. DLSC Levin further clarified that it was his view that one of the five vehicles identified on the CCTV camera from a private residence (described in paragraph 46) was likely the vehicle that struck Getahun, with vehicles 5 and 7, having been excluded.

FINDINGS AND CONCLUSION

56. Pursuant to section 67(1) of the Act, I find that:
- (a) the identity of the deceased was Getahun Mebrahtom Zigta, born 22 October 1990;
 - (b) the death occurred on 12 May 2025 at the Royal Melbourne Hospital, 300 Grattan Street, Parkville, Victoria;
 - (c) the medical cause of Getahun's death was head injury (pedestrian); and
 - (d) the death occurred in the circumstances described above.
57. Having considered all the available evidence, I am satisfied that Getahun died as a result of being struck by a motor vehicle from behind whilst walking northwest along the Western Freeway, Cobblebank, near to the fog line dividing the Mount Cottrell Road on ramp and the road shoulder. The incident leading to death occurred between 5.52am and 5.54 am on 8 May 2025. Despite an exhaustive police investigation, the driver of the vehicle that struck Getahun has not been identified, however it is more likely that the vehicle involved was either a truck or a 4WD type vehicle which was travelling at a minimum speed of 70km/h.
58. In the event that further information becomes available which clarifies the circumstances of Getahun's death, such as the identity of the driver involved, the Act provides that the coronial investigation can be re-opened.
59. I convey my sincere condolences to Getahun's family for their loss and acknowledge the traumatic circumstances in which is death occurred.

PUBLICATION OF FINDING

60. Pursuant to section 73(1) of the Act, I order that this finding be published on the Coroners Court of Victoria website in accordance with the rules.

DISTRIBUTION OF FINDING

I direct that a copy of this finding be provided to the following:

Mebrahtom Zigta, senior next of kin

Kellie Gumm, Royal Melbourne Hospital

Detective Leading Senior Constable Brandon Levin, Victoria Police,

Coroner's Investigator

Signature:



Coroner Sarah Gebert

Date: 14 September 2026



NOTE: Under section 83 of the *Coroners Act 2008* ('the Act'), a person with sufficient interest in an investigation may appeal to the Trial Division of the Supreme Court against the findings of a coroner in respect of a death after an inquest. An appeal must be made within 6 months after the day on which the determination is made, unless the Supreme Court grants leave to appeal out of time under section 86 of the Act.
