

NCIS News

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The NCIS is managed by the Victorian Institute of Forensic Medicine on behalf of the State/Federal funding agencies. The NCIS is funded by each State/Territory Justice Department around Australia, and the Australian Departments of Health & Ageing and Employment & Workplace Relations, the ACCC, the ATSB and the AIC.

New staff member Lisa Crockett

NCIS Coronial Liaison Officer Anne McKenzie recently gave birth to a lovely baby boy named Charlie. Mum, Dad and Charlie are all doing well. While Anne is on maternity leave, her position is being filled by Lisa Crockett.

Lisa comes to the NCIS from Corrections Victoria, where she has worked for the past four years, first at the Melbourne Assessment Prison in the city, and then at the Metropolitan Remand Centre in Ravenhall. At the MRC, Lisa spent most of her time working with the St. Vincent's team in the medical centre.

Prior to her custodial career, Lisa worked in various nursing roles including a short stint at Thomas Embling. Lisa also has a background in project management, working with Heritage Victoria, the Department of Human Services and Ansett airlines, specialising in technical documentation and quality assurance.

Outside work, in her own words, Lisa lives with two teenagers, three beagles and one black cat... and her mum.

Fatal Road Crash Database project update

The NCIS continues its successful management of the Australian Transport Safety Bureau's Fatal Road Crash Database.

The ATSB has recently agreed to provide additional funding for the retrospective upload of NSW police narratives to the NCIS, should it prove practically feasible, in particular (but not limited to) those pertaining to motor vehicle accidents. The NSW Coroner's Office would send hard copies of the narratives to the NCIS, where they would be scanned, edited and uploaded to the database. This would assist not only the FRCD project, but general NCIS users, by improving the accessibility of NSW police narratives on the NCIS.

The coding of 2004 fatal road crashes has recently been completed and 2005 coding is now commencing. It is anticipated this will be completed near the end of 2007. Final protocols are being put in place to allow external parties to access the FRCD data and all NCIS users will be notified when this becomes available.

As part of its management of the FRCD and with the funding assistance of the ATSB, the VIFM has employed two part time staff members, Adam Wallace and Bronwyn Hewitt, to work on the FRCD. In their own words, here is some information about our new staff members:

Adam Wallace

Adam is 35 years old, but only just. He is a qualified civil engineer and primary school teacher. He also writes books for children, most of which are fairly mature, sophisticated and educational. His first published book was immature, unsophisticated and taught you nothing at all. It has been very successful.

Adam has been working on the FRCD for the last 12 years.

Adam likes Collingwood, sunsets and playing golf.

Bronwyn Hewitt

Bronwyn is a country girl from Trentham with two teenage children. She recently completed her bachelor of Health Information Management.

Bronwyn's recent work assignments have been at Wangaratta, Nhill, Latrobe, Seymour, Bacchus Marsh & Ballan as a temporary Health Information Manager / Clinical Coder. She has also completed Certificates in Finance and undertaken work at Inglewood and locally to home.

Bronwyn is lucky to have a house husband so is free to travel for work. She spends most of her spare time being 'Mum's taxi', especially with her son who is involved in all sorts of sport.

She also helps out with homework, works on the family tree with her Mum, takes part in local committees such as school council sub committees and the church guild, helps out on her hobby farm and studies when time permits.

NCIS Strategic Plan

The NCIS Strategic Plan, endorsed by the Board of Management, has now been officially released and is available on the NCIS website.

The NCIS unit is in the process of seeking funding for two key initiatives from the Plan – the appointment of dedicated NCIS coders and research officers in each jurisdiction. There has been willingness by NCIS funders to investigate the feasibility of resourcing these initiatives and it is hoped this important aspect of the Plan will be funded and implemented in the near future.

The 2007/08 NCIS Business Plan is based on the Strategic Plan's ten objectives. The Business Plan is ambitious but will be achievable with sustained work and effort. Some examples of activities scheduled for this financial year, in addition to those mentioned above, include:

- Developing specifications for an Australian coroners' web resource,
- Review of the NCIS search interface,
- Securing funding for national implementation of Drugs Module and Police form enhancements,
- Availability of data reports and data cubes on the NCIS website, and
- Improved strategic activities for promoting the NCIS, including development of a communications plan.

NCIS hosts AMDIG meeting and coder training sessions

The NCIS team had a busy July 2007, hosting two important national workshops.

On the 17th and 18th of July, NCIS hosted the annual meeting of the Australasian Mortality Data Interest Group (AMDIG). The meeting involved round table discussions with researchers, statisticians and policy makers from organisations with an interest in the collection and use of Australian mortality data. Two days of lively discussion saw a range of topics covered that included the coding of 'intent' from coronial findings and Australian Bureau of Statistics processes for collecting and coding mortality data. The group was also

treated to presentations from Victorian State Coroner Graeme Johnstone on coronial processes, and VIFM Forensic Technician Emily Orchard on the mortuary's Computerised Tomography Scanner.

This event was closely followed by a series of coder training workshops on the 22nd to 24th of July, for coronial staff from around Australia with an involvement in the entry of mortality data to the NCIS. This workshop was designed to introduce the coders to the updated NCIS codeset, based predominantly on the International Classification of External Cause Injuries standard. The coders were given intensive training on the structure and use of the updated codeset, and were supplied with new NCIS data dictionaries and coding manuals at the conclusion of the training. These sessions were also an important opportunity for coders from each State/Territory to network with their counterparts in other jurisdictions. It is anticipated the updated codeset will be in full use on the NCIS by November 2007.

International interest in the NCIS

The NCIS continues to generate interest from countries around the world. All New Zealand coroners and research support staff now have access to the NCIS. In future it is planned that New Zealand coronial data will be uploaded to the NCIS, broadening its scope.

NCIS also recently received an enquiry from Japanese forensic practitioners about using elements of the NCIS to help establish their own mortality database on medical adverse events.

A visit to Statistics Canada is scheduled for November 2007 by Jessica Pearse to review and exchange information about mortality databases, with Canada having developed a Coroners/Medical Examiner Database in a pilot form.

Uses of NCIS Data

The NCIS recently provided some data about intentional self harm deaths in South Australia, represented by Statistical Division, to the South Australian Department of Mental Health. The data identified a number of intentional self harm deaths were occurring in the Eyre Peninsula region, relative to other regions.

This information was forwarded to the Federal Government and was used to help support the Government's decision to inject \$2.2 million into mental health services in the Eyre and central remote regions.

NCIS data was also recently used by Queensland Parliament's Travelsafe Committee, who requested a report on child deaths from low speed vehicle runovers. The report was heavily referenced in the Committee's report to Parliament, which used the NCIS evidence base among other data to formulate a number of recommendations aimed at reducing and preventing these deaths in the future.

Quality Assurance

The table below represents critical coding error rates identified by the NCIS Quality Assurance Team for cases closed during 2005, 2006 and 2007. The table demonstrates a consistent reduction in the proportion of cases where errors were detected.

Month cases closed	2005	2006	2007
January	-	23.57%	24.72%
February	-	24.12%	19.93%
March	27.24%	-	18.07%
April	44.96%	-	-
May	30.69%	-	-
June	29.53%	24.73%	-
July	27.31%	16.37%	-
August	24.92%	17.07%	-
September	25.31%	17.24%	-
October	22.83%	20.85%	-
November	19.30%	22.35%	-
December	21.24%	17.70%	-

ICECI upgrade project

The upgrade of the NCIS codesets has commenced implementation, with data entry staff in coroners' offices (all except NSW and VIC) now using the new codeset.

Many of the codesets used in the NCIS are based on the International Classification of External Cause Injuries (ICECI) and this project has upgraded the previous draft version to the current version 1.2. The upgrade of the codesets will ensure that the NCIS data continues to be useful when compared with national and international data.

Eleven of the NCIS core codesets have been updated:

- Case Type(Notification & Completion);
- Intent (Notification & Completion);
- Incident Activity Details;
- Location;
- Sports / Recreation;
- Mechanism of Injury;
- Object or Substance Producing Injury;
- Mode of Transport;
- Counterpart;
- Context; and
- User.

As well as updating the codesets in the LCMS and NCIS data fields, the upgrade includes the mapping of all existing coding to the new codesets.

The completion of this mapping process may take several months as the NCIS team will need to analyse and map all "Other Specified" Free Text fields currently being used.

The NCIS Data Dictionary and NCIS Coding Manual and User Guides have been updated to reflect the new codesets. Both documents have been loaded onto the NCIS Website. Requests for hard copies of the documents should be directed to NCIS Quality Manager Leanne Daking. A concordance document will be produced and made available on the NCIS website shortly.

Document Attachment and Case Closure Update

Case closure rates

The case closure rates table below demonstrates that 80% of cases on the NCIS are closed. The ACT, TAS and SA have case closure rates of 90% or more. Furthermore, all States/Territories have a case closure rate of more than 68%.

State/Territory	% Closed
ACT	90%
NSW	73%
NT	88%
QLD	69%
SA	94%
TAS	91%
VIC	86%
WA	74%
Grand Total	80%

Document attachment rates

The document attachment rates table below shows that Victoria has the highest percentage of cases with documents attached compared with the other States/Territories, ranging from 90-98% of cases for the different document types. Police narratives were the most consistently attached document to NCIS cases, with the different States/Territories having between 54% and 97% of cases with a police narrative attached. NCIS is still working on obtaining QLD and SA autopsy and toxicology reports and NSW toxicology reports.

State/Territory	AUTOPSY	FINDING	TOXICOLOGY	POLICE NARRATIVE
ACT	91%	88%	64%	96%
NSW	77%	53%	0%	54%
NT	93%	91%	54%	96%
QLD	0%	13%	0%	78%
SA	1%	43%	11%	96%
TAS	63%	80%	87%	96%
VIC	90%	98%	98%	97%
WA	33%	89%	62%	92%

Recent and upcoming NCIS Activities

- In July, Jessica visited New Zealand to train its coronial research staff on how to search on the NCIS.
- Stephen presented on the NCIS to a group of high school students interested in pursuing careers in forensics at the VIFM's annual career information day.
- Jessica and Lisa will be attending the Australasian Coroners Society conference in October in Tasmania.
- Leanne is attending the next AMDIG meeting, held in New Zealand in November.
- The NCIS Board meeting was held in Brisbane in August – among other items, the NCIS indigenous origin data policy and proposed Key Performance Indicator targets were discussed.

Tips and tricks

Search limitations of the NCIS

Access levels

Authorised users are only able to access information contained on the NCIS in accordance with the level(s) of access they have been authorised. Therefore you may not be able to identify cases that are open on the NCIS, or to view documents attached to a case, until the case is closed on the NCIS. In accordance with your authorised access permissions, you may also be unable to view cases from particular jurisdictions.

Data completeness

Data is coded and uploaded to the NCIS on an ongoing basis as information becomes available during the coronial investigation. However in most jurisdictions, the majority of the coding involving object, mechanism, location and activity will only be coded once the case has been completed by the coroner, and is ready to be closed on the system.

In some cases, the NCIS will not have access to full text reports for a particular case or jurisdiction. You should take this into account when attempting to identifying cases through keyword searching.

Reports not currently available on the NCIS

- NSW toxicology reports
- SA Autopsy and PM reports
- QLD Autopsy and PM reports

ICD-10 and ASGC codes and Death Registration Numbers

ICD-10 and ASGC codes and Registration Numbers are provided to the NCIS by the Australian Bureau of Statistics once they have been publicly released. This data is normally provided for the time period 18 months prior (eg. in early 2008, ABS coding for 2006 fatalities will become available).

Therefore we suggest you utilise alternative search methods if you are attempting to identify recent cases on the NCIS via any of these codes.

There are also some cases where the ICD-10 and other ABS provided code sets will not be available. This is due to the fact that these cases were not able to be matched with confidence by the ABS to any of their records. (The NCIS has ICD-10 and ASGC codes for 87% of cases reported in 2005).

Keyword searching

If you are searching attached reports for the occurrence of certain keywords or phrases, you should take into account that your results may be affected by the following:

- spelling errors
- different use of terminology
- lack of documentation
- false positives (although the term is mentioned within the document, it does not necessarily mean the case is relevant to your area of interest)

Wildcard searching on the NCIS

In light of the increase in the volume of cases on the NCIS and users now accessing the system, it is necessary to ask all NCIS users to temporarily refrain from using the wildcard * operator when performing keyword searches on the NCIS (e.g. fire* would find fired, fires, firey etc). Due to the level of complexity and processing time this type of search involves, performing a wildcard search can reduce performance of searches from other concurrent users of the database.

We have an upgrade of the NCIS servers scheduled for a few months time, and with the extra processing speed and capacity this will bring, we expect to be able to advise that wildcard searching will again be available on the NCIS.

We apologise for any inconvenience.

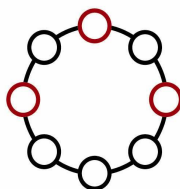
Recent NCIS research reports

The table below provides a list of some of the research reports completed by the NCIS Unit since the previous edition of NCIS News in February 2007. To obtain a copy of any of these reports, please contact NCIS Access Liaison Officer Marde Hoy.

Report title
Deaths of Overseas Tourists in Australia
Deaths of homeless people in Victoria
National and QLD scuba diving & snorkelling fatalities
Weather related deaths reported to Australian coroners
Deaths where the deceased's clothing caught alight
Motor vehicle accident deaths on farms involving tractors
Falls into Septic Tanks
Bushfire and wildfire fatalities
Driveway deaths of children where the child was run over by a motor vehicle
Skiing Deaths
Firearm related deaths
Child poisonings under 5 years
"Dead in bed" syndrome
Auger (post hole digger) fatalities in Victoria
Deaths of children aged 0 to 17 years inclusive on farms in Queensland and nationally
Fatalities at level crossings
Shaken Baby Syndrome
Motor vehicle accidents involving domestic animals and livestock
Motorised scooter deaths
Deaths where the deceased was crushed while operating heavy machinery
Clozapine related deaths
National paraquat poisoning deaths
National incidents of children drowning in dams
Deaths while boarding or alighting a bus
Blunt force/crushing deaths of children resulting from falling furniture
Canoe, kayak and white water rafting deaths
Deaths of children at school
Police pursuit MVA related deaths in Victoria
Deaths in Victoria where alcohol was detected (excluding intentional self harm deaths and motor vehicle accidents)
Tree and branch fall related deaths
External cause deaths in public places in Victoria
External cause deaths in the Northern Territory
Drownings at beaches
Drownings of international tourists to Australia

Any comments or suggestions?

We welcome your input! If you have any comments or suggestions for the content of NCIS News, please contact Marde Hoy on 03 9684 4323 or at mardeh@vifm.org. The next edition of NCIS News is scheduled for release in early 2008.



NCIS