



**Monash University National Centre for
Coronial Information**

developing and managing

The National Coroners Information System

ANNUAL REPORT

1 JULY 2000

TO

30 JUNE 2001

MUNCCI
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Table of Contents

1. Preface	1
2. Executive Summary	2
2.1 Major Achievements.....	2
2.2 Review Against Operational Objectives, Business Plan 1999 – 2002...	3
2.3 Review against objectives identified for 2000/2001.....	4
2.4 Objectives for 2001/2002	4
3. MUNCCI Board and Staff	5
3.1 Board of Management.....	5
3.2 NCIS Project Team	6
4. National Coordination Committee for Coronial Information (NCCCI)	7
5. MUNCCI Activities	8
5.1 NCIS version 2 - Implementation	8
5.2 National Minimum Data Set for Police Investigation of Coronial Deaths in Australia	8
5.3 Drugs Module Project.....	8
5.4 Water-Related Deaths Data Needs Feasibility Study.....	9
5.5 Quality Assurance	9
5.6 Access Regime	10
5.7 Research Activities.....	11
6. Funding Arrangements	12
6.1 Core funding.....	12
7. Financial Statements	13
7.1 Core Funding	13
7.2 Drugs Module project	13
7.3 Water-related Deaths Data Needs Feasibility Study	14
7.3 In-kind Support.....	14
Schedule 1 - NCCCI Membership	15

1. Preface

I am pleased to present MUNCCI's third annual report which details the key achievements over the period 1 July 2000 to 30 June 2001. Of particular interest are the following outputs:

- Recommendations of the NCIS Core Data Set Working Group implemented (see section 5.1 – NCIS version 2);
- Substantial redevelopment of the NCIS web interface to provide improved functionality;
- Authorised access provided to coronial users and Third Parties;
- In principle agreement obtained from all State/Chief Coroners and all State and Territory police services to implement a national minimum data set for police investigations of coronial deaths;
- Definition of a set of NCIS enhancements to improve the quantity and quality of data on certain types of deaths, in particular drug-related and water related deaths; and
- Development of the *NCIS Quality Assurance Plan*.

MUNCCI's ability to achieve these outputs continues to depend to a large extent on our collaborative partners. We rely on the support of Coroners and their staff (especially for entering the core data), pathologists, police, policy and administrative staff in government departments, staff in universities, research organisations and statutory bodies. The work of the National Coordination Committee for Coronial Information, chaired by Professor Dennis Else, has continued to provide valuable oversight and strategic expertise.

MUNCCI's challenge now is to ensure that the NCIS realises its potential to contribute to death and injury prevention. With all participating jurisdictions now contributing core data to the NCIS, MUNCCI's focus has shifted to improving its quality and completeness.

The current strategies being used both at MUNCCI and in Coroners' Offices over the next 12 month period aim to achieve this so that the NCIS can fulfil its purpose as a useful tool in preventing death and injury. I believe that MUNCCI's achievements to date put us in a strong position to advance further towards this goal.

**STEPHEN CORDNER
DIRECTOR, MUNCCI**

DIRECTOR, VICTORIAN INSTITUTE OF FORENSIC MEDICINE

**PROFESSOR OF FORENSIC MEDICINE,
MONASH UNIVERSITY**

2. Executive Summary

This is the third Annual Report of the Monash University National Centre for Coronial Information (MUNCCI). For information regarding the history of the establishment of MUNCCI and the development of the NCIS please see our previous Annual Reports and our Business Plan 1999/2000 – 2001/2002 (available on our web site at www.vifp.monash.edu.au/ncis).

2.1 Major Achievements

- Approval of the Standing Committee of Attorneys-General for the NCIS access regime developed by MUNCCI and the NCCCI;
- Ethics Committee process for consideration of applications by Third Parties in operation;
- Further work undertaken on behalf of the Commonwealth Department of Health and Aged Care, Drug Strategy Unit, on the identification of strategies to improve the quality and quantity of data on drug-related deaths;
- Further work undertaken on behalf of the Commonwealth Department of Health and Aged Care, Injury Prevention Unit, on the identification of strategies to improve the quality and quantity of data on water-related deaths;
- Definition of a set of NCIS enhancements to improve the quantity and quality of data on certain types of deaths, in particular drug-related and water related deaths;
- In principle agreement obtained from all State/Chief Coroners and all State and Territory police services to implement a national minimum data set for police investigations of coronial deaths;
- Recommendations of the NCIS Core Data Set Working Group implemented (see section 5.1 – NCIS version 2);
- All States and Territories (except Queensland) converted NCIS version 2;
- Supporting documentation completed and made available on-line (including *NCIS Data Dictionary*, *NCIS Coding Manual*, *NCIS Search Manual*);
- Substantial redevelopment of the NCIS web interface to provide improved functionality;
- Authorised access provided to coronial users (coroners, clerks, coronial unit police, forensic medical and scientific personnel);
- As of 30th June 2001, forty Third Party applications received and processed;
- Three (3) year contract secured with the National Centre for Classification in Health (NCCH) for the provision of an appropriately qualified person to fulfil the role of QA Officer for MUNCCI;
- Development of the *NCIS Quality Assurance Plan*.

2.2 Review Against Operational Objectives, Business Plan 1999 – 2002

Section 6 of the Business Plan 1999-2002 sets out the operational objectives for the period. A summary of progress against the objectives relevant to the current reporting period is set out below.

Objective 2 – Licence Agreements in place by 30 June 2000

A template Licence Agreement was drafted with the assistance of the New South Wales Crown Solicitor's Office and submitted to the Standing Committee of Attorneys-General for approval in July 2000. It was approved and has been executed by the relevant authority in each participating State and Territory.

Objective 3 – Access Rules specified by 30 June 2000

The template Access Rules were drafted in consultation with State and Territory Coroners and submitted to the Standing Committee of Attorneys-General for approval in July 2000. The Access Rules are set out in the Schedule to each Licence Agreement which was approved.

Objective 5 – Secure environment

Development of the MUNCCI/NCIS Security Procedures Manual is underway.

Work has continued in consultation with participating jurisdictions to ensure that optimal data transfer security procedures will take place.

Objective 6 – Administrative

Each jurisdiction with a MUNCCI case management system (CMS) as been provided with up to date User Manuals.

Help desk support for participating coronial offices and NCIS users has been provided. Assistance is provided promptly and problems usually resolved within the hour. More complex problems have been logged for resolution as soon as practicable.

Objective 7 – Financial Management

MUNCCI has managed the NCIS within budget and operational costs are transparent (see section 7).

Monitoring of third party usage patterns to identify potential cost recovery scale has commenced and a fee-for service model will be developed for consideration by the NCCCI by the end of 2001.

2.3 Review against objectives identified for 2000/2001

In our last annual report we identified the following objectives, all of which have been achieved.

- Start granting access to Coroners, their death investigation staff and defined third parties.
- Complete implementation of revised core data set – major task.
- Develop updates of CMS and NCIS as required.
- Ensure appropriate training provided to coronial staff as required.
- Implement further versions of CMS and NCIS as required.
- Complete *NCIS Data Dictionary*.
- Develop *NCIS Coding Manual* for use by coronial staff.
- Continue drugs module development.
- Develop *NCIS Quality Assurance Plan*.
- Work with Queensland on participation issues.
- Update web site as required.
- Continue to promote NCIS as a valuable death and injury surveillance research tool.
- Continue to manage the NCIS within budget.

2.4 Objectives for 2001/2002

- Implement *NCIS Quality Assurance Plan* to maximise data quality and completeness;
- Continue to attract and process Third Party applications;
- Promote the NCIS as a valuable death and injury prevention research tool;
- Using the NCIS, identify trends, patterns and risk factors in coronial deaths;
- Ensure prompt and effective Help Desk support is provided for both data entry staff at participating jurisdictions and Third Party users;
- Develop viable long term fee-for-service strategy;
- Complete technical development of NCIS version 3;
- Strengthen relationships with international coronial centres, in particular New Zealand and Canada.

3. MUNCCI Board and Staff

MUNCCI is a research centre of Monash University. It is a consortium of the Victorian Institute of Forensic Medicine (VIFM - which is both the Department of Forensic Medicine and a Victorian statutory authority under the Department of Justice), the Monash University Accident Research Centre (MUARC) and the Department of Epidemiology and Preventive Medicine.

3.1 Board of Management

The Board's functions are to:

1. Develop and approve strategic directions for the MUNCCI.
2. Monitor the implementation and operation of the National Coroners Information System.
3. Provide advice and support necessary for the Centre to discharge its responsibilities to the University, State and Territory coroners and key stakeholders.
4. Oversee the provision by the Centre of services provided in accordance with agreements made with user agencies.
5. Receive and approve the Centre's budget statements.
6. Receive and approve the Centre's annual reports to the University.
7. Ensure the timely and effective completion of the work program of the Centre.
8. Play an active role in ensuring effective communication between the Centre and the University, State and Territory coroners (including the Australian Coroners' Society) and key stakeholders.

Board members:

Chairperson: Professor Nick Saunders, Dean of Medicine (to 19 Feb 2001)
Professor John McNeil, Head of Department of Epidemiology and Preventive Medicine (from 19 February 2001)

Members:

Professor Stephen Cordner	Director VIFM, Director MUNCCI
Assoc Prof Olaf Drummer	Head Scientific Services VIFM
Dr James Harrison	Director of the Research Centre for Injury Studies Flinders University (incorporating the National Injury Surveillance Unit)
Graeme Johnstone	State Coroner of Victoria (representing the Australian Coroners' Society)
Jessica Lightfoot	NCIS Project Manager (to 31 May 2001)
Professor John McNeil	Head of the Department of Epidemiology and Preventive Medicine (to 19 February 2001, thereafter Chair)
Professor Joan Ozanne-Smith	Chair of Injury Prevention, MUARC
Assoc Professor David Ranson	Deputy Director, VIFM

The Board met in February 2001. In particular, the Board considered the long term skill set of the MUNCCI team, a policy statement for module development, the Annual Report, MUNCCI Quality Assurance policy, the MUNCCI Team Operational Plan to end June 2001, on-line status and issues arising from implementation of the revised core data set, and a review of MUNCCI's achievements measured against objectives set out in the MUNCCI Business Plan 1999/2000 - 2000/2002.

3.2 NCIS Project Team

In May 2001 Jessica Lightfoot resigned after nearly three years with MUNCCI to take up a senior advisory position in the Office of the Deputy Vice-Chancellor (Resources) at Monash University.

In July 2001 Natasha Redman resigned after 20 months with MUNCCI as Drugs Module Project Officer to take up a consulting position.

MUNCCI

The staff composition during 2000/2001 was as follows:

- **Jessica Lightfoot** Project Manager
(July 1998 – May 2001);
- **Jenny Neame** Team Leader, Systems Development
(since July 1998);
- **Jarrold Boxall** Programmer/Data Analyst
(since March 1999);
- **Lyndal Owens** Project Officer
(since November 1999);
- **Natasha Redman** Project Officer, Drugs Module
(since November 1999); and
- **Karen Peasley** Quality Assurance Office
(on secondment from National Centre for
Classification in Health - Sydney since November
2000).

4. National Coordination Committee for Coronial Information (NCCCI)

In 2000/2001 the role of the NCCCI was changed. Its initial role was to develop a national policy and funding framework for the NCIS and these tasks were achieved in 1999/2000. At its meeting in June 2000, the NCCCI agreed to amend its terms of reference. It was agreed that the NCCCI meet at least annually to consider the following issues:

- Reports on status of data contributions;
- Reports on data quality and action taken to improve data quality;
- Appropriateness of core data set;
- Proposed major enhancements to the database;
- MUNCCI's annual report, including financial statements;
- Ongoing funding arrangements.

Membership for 2000/2001 and the organisation members represented are set out in Schedule 1.

5. MUNCCI Activities

5.1 NCIS version 2 - Implementation

Throughout 2000/2001 the MUNCCI technical team worked on implementation of the recommendations of the NCIS Core Data Set Working Group (see last years' annual report for more details). Work included:

- changes to each of the five versions of the CMS;
- changes to the front and back ends of the NCIS;
- finalisation of the NCIS Data Dictionary;
- development of the NCIS Coding Manual;
- development of the NCIS Search Manual.

Data from 1 July 2000 has been coded according to NCIS version 2 for all participating jurisdictions. Of the seven participating jurisdictions, 5 use the MUNCCI case management system (CMS) to provide both the NCIS core data set and local requirements for data and reporting. Each jurisdiction's version therefore differs as far as local requirements are concerned.

5.2 National Minimum Data Set for Police Investigation of Coronial Deaths in Australia

As part of the NCIS development, MUNCCI has considered ways to improve the consistency, comparability and comprehensiveness of coronial information across all jurisdictions. Police death investigation documents, in particular the Report of Death to the coroner, provide a valuable source of information to inform death investigations and death and injury prevention efforts. In the last 12 months MUNCCI has worked on the development of a National Minimum Data Set (NMDS) for Police Investigation of Coronial Deaths.

MUNCCI undertook considerable consultation with a range of stakeholder groups, including coroners, police and public health and safety agencies, to determine data items considered desirable and feasible for collection by police. The data set includes areas of death related to work, consumer-products, fire, hospitals, anaesthetic, drowning, firearms/weapons, drugs/alcohol/poisons, transport, self-inflicted harm and children.

The final version of the NMDS was completed in June 2001 and MUNCCI is now working with police Commissioners in each jurisdiction to finalise implementation.

5.3 Drugs Module Project

Throughout 2000/2001, MUNCCI Project Officer, Natasha Redman liaised with police, toxicologists and pathologists to finalise the list of data items to be incorporated into the NCIS data set (version 3) in order to capture information that relates specifically to deaths associated with drugs, poisons and alcohol.

The list of requirements for further progress towards implementation includes:

- The addition of 40 new data items to be added to version 2 of the NCIS data set, to form version 3 of the NCIS data set;
- Development of web pages to facilitate searches on drug related deaths;
- Development of training documentation for data entry personnel. This will be for each version of the MUNCCI CMS and for data entry into the NCIS;

- Development of data retrieval materials for searching drug related deaths; and
- Development of quality management guidelines for the new data items.

Implementation of the Drugs Module enhancements has now been amalgamated with other enhancements to the NCIS and is due to be completed by mid 2002.

Having coordinated the Drugs Module project to this point, ready for technical implementation, Natasha Redman has left the MUNCCI team to take up a consulting position. Her skills in liaison and organisation have provided the technical team with a sound basis for the next stage of development for the Drugs Module data items.

5.4 Water-Related Deaths Data Needs Feasibility Study

In April 2000 MUNCCI was funded by the Injury Prevention Section of the Commonwealth Department of Health and Aged Care to conduct a six month feasibility study into using the NCIS to capture improved data on water-related fatalities in Australia. As part of this study MUNCCI established a Water-Related Death Reference Group which consisted of representatives of major water safety agencies, researchers and aquatic industry groups.

One of the major tasks of this group was to consider possible strategies for improved data collection. There was consensus among participants of the Reference Group that the best method for data collection would be by the police for their initial report of death to the coroner. An audit of jurisdictional police forms revealed that there was no systematic collection of information specific to water-related fatalities. The development of a list of data items on drowning / water-related death was then undertaken by MUNCCI in consultation with the NCIS Water-Related Death Reference Group.

The key recommendations of this study to improve data collection and quality were:

- Promotion of a National Minimum Data Set (NMDS) for Police Investigation of Coronial Deaths;
- Implementation of enhancements to the NCIS (including additional data items approved by police for collection); and
- Development of specific NCIS Data Dictionary definitions and coding instructions for data entry personnel on water-related variables.

5.5 Quality Assurance

The *Data Dictionary for the National Coroners Information System; Version 1* was released in May 2001. The dictionary is a reference manual for persons involved in the entry, use and analysis of information contained in the Core Data Set. The dictionary lists all the core data items and provides a uniform definition and explanation of the data item; a statement of the type of information required and a full description of the classification used including the source and user guidelines. The dictionary has been provided to all coronial jurisdictions and relevant stakeholders.

The *National Coroners Information System Coding Manual; Draft 1* was also released in May 2001. The manual provides practical instructions, examples and guidelines for coronial clerks and others responsible for the entry of data

onto local case management systems and the NCIS. The manual has been disseminated to all jurisdictions and will be updated on a regular basis.

A coding specific support email help line was established in June 2001. Any questions concerning the coding of NCIS cases can be directed to this email and responses made to the enquirer within 48 hours.

The first draft of the NCIS Quality Assurance (QA) Plan was presented at the NCCCI meeting in April 2001. The plan is based upon the NCIS QA Framework document produced in 1999. The plan focuses on specific quality targets which are:

- Completeness – includes assessment of whether all reported cases are being transferred between local systems to the NCIS and also reviews the data fields for completeness to ensure that there are no 'null' fields.
- Timeliness – the data needs to be as up-to-date as possible so that coroners and third party users know that they are accessing current data.
- Validity and reliability – the data is required to be true values and the information to be stable and consistent.

Work on these areas of the QA plan has been underway since May 2001 and will continue on a regular review system.

5.6 Access Regime

Further to the discussion under section 3.1, the following documentation was approved by the Standing Committee of Attorneys-General at their July 2000 meeting. These documents define the framework for MUNCCI to manage access to the NCIS.

1. Template Licence Agreement – bilateral arrangements between Monash University and each participating jurisdiction.
2. NCIS Privacy Protocols – Schedule 8 to the Licence Agreement.
3. NCIS Access Agreement – bilateral agreement between MUNCCI and approved Third Party organisations.
4. Information Sheet – this sets out the procedure to be followed in making an application for access for general research purposes.

Documents 2, 3 and 4 are available on our web site.

The draft Access Rules developed by MUNCCI are based on the instructions of participating State and Chief Coroners. Each jurisdiction's rules are ultimately to be determined by the relevant State/Chief Coroner and will be set out in the Schedule to the Licence Agreement. The draft Access Rules specify access to the NCIS by two categories of users.

Category 1 – Coronial Users

This category includes coroners and clerks, coronial unit police, forensic medical and scientific personnel and other investigators conducting an investigation for and on behalf of the Coroner for the purpose of informing a current coronial inquiry. Access permissions can only be issued by MUNCCI on the written authority of the relevant State/Chief Coroner and after each authorised individual has signed the NCIS Confidentiality Undertaking.

Category 2 – ‘Third Party’ Users.

Third Party access is currently restricted to government and research agencies and specified not-for-profit public health and safety agencies (eg Royal Life Saving Societies, SIDS Foundation).

Third Party applicants are required to submit an application to the Monash University Standing Committee on Ethics Involving Humans (SCERH) via the NCIS Application Form. Applicants who require access to Level 1 data from Western Australia are also required to obtain ethical approval from the WA Coronial Ethics Committee (WACEC).

Once all necessary approvals are obtained, applicants are then required to sign the NCIS Access Agreement and pay any required fee. MUNCCI will then issue nominated staff members with a username and password.

The NCIS Application Form and Survival Guide are available on the NCIS web site.

5.7 Research Activities

As a research centre with knowledge of coronial matters, MUNCCI is well positioned to undertake research activities to inform public health and safety strategies. The Water-Related Death Data Needs Feasibility Study was one such research project undertaken by MUNCCI (see 5.4 for recommendations of this study). The final report of this project is available on the NCIS web site.

Once the NCIS has complete and quality data from all jurisdictions, it is envisaged that MUNCCI will report of trends and patterns in issues of MUNCCI Talk.

6. Funding Arrangements

6.1 Core funding

Pursuant to the three (3) year national funding strategy developed by the NCCCI, funding was secured in 2000/2001 for the continued development of the NCIS in accordance with the table below.

Funding of NCIS for 1999/2000 to 2001/2002			
Jurisdiction	<u>1999/2000</u>	<u>2000/2001</u>	<u>2001/2002</u>
Commonwealth	250,000	257,500	265,000
New South Wales	84,552	87,089	89,700
Victoria	61,802	63,656	65,500
Queensland	46,310	47,700	49,100
South Australia	20,048	20,650	21,250
Western Australia	24,241	24,968	25,700
Tasmania	6,411	6,603	6,800
ACT	4,193	4,318	4,400
NT	2,443	2,516	2,550
Total	\$500,000	\$515,000	\$530,000

With the exception of the amounts sought from the Commonwealth and Queensland, the amounts indicated for 2000/2001 were secured. The Queensland Office of Fair Trading has agreed to contribute \$6,370 per annum for three years in line with a decision of the Ministerial Council on Consumer Affairs.

The amount sought from the Commonwealth over the three years totals \$772,500. The amount sought for the two years to 30th June 2001, is \$507,000. The amount secured for the two years to June 30th 2001, totals \$491,000, a shortfall of \$14,000 for that two year period. Commonwealth government agencies that have not contributed to the national funding strategy but that seek access to NCIS data for the period 2001/2002 will therefore be charged an agreed rate.

7. Financial Statements

MUNCCI/NCIS funds are audited as part of the Monash University audited accounts. Funding and expenditure is detailed below.

7.1 Core Funding

Income	\$
Brought forward 99/00	71594
Commonwealth, State and Territory contributions	550335
Sale of CMS (Tasmania, South Australia)	18653
Other	300
Total core income	640882
Expenditure	
Salary costs	256858
Operating costs (phone, fax, consumables)	8194
Hardware	15579
Software support	11870
Staff Training/Education	5725
Consultancies	93221
Travel	23646
NCCCI / catering	906
VIFM network services (Internet access, IT support)	39000
Total core expenditure	454,999
BALANCE	185,883

7.2 Drugs Module project

Income	\$
Brought forward 99/00	76641
Payments 3	100000
Payments 4	91700
Total income	178341
Expenditure	
Salary costs	76841
Printing	707
Travel	1869
July 2001 National Workshop Venues	8988
Hardware/Office	1190
Consultants	2000
Operational support (IT consultation, PC support) – fixed cost	13000
Administration costs (office supplies, phone etc) – fixed cost	5000
Total expenditure	109595
BALANCE	68746

7.3 Water-related Deaths Data Needs Feasibility Study

Income		\$
Payment		15000
Total income		15000
Expenditure		
Salary costs		14000
Operating Costs		1000
Total expenditure		15000
BALANCE		0

7.3 In-kind Support

Again this year a number of agencies have provided in-kind support that does not show up in the income and expenditure statement. In particular, MUNCCI acknowledges the following organisations for their valuable contributions of time and expertise.

Monash University Accident Research Centre (MUARC)

- Ongoing assistance with refining NCIS version 2 data set; and
- Advice regarding data items for inclusion in MUNCCI's proposed national minimum data set for police investigations of coronial deaths.

National Injury Surveillance Unit (NISU)

- Ongoing assistance with refining NCIS version 2 data set;
- Advice regarding data items for inclusion in MUNCCI's proposed national minimum data set for police investigations of coronial deaths.

National Occupational Health and Safety Commission (NOHSC)

- Ongoing assistance with refining NCIS version 2 data set;
- Advice regarding data items for inclusion in MUNCCI's proposed national minimum data set for police investigations of coronial deaths.

Australian Bureau of Statistics (ABS)

- Ongoing support regarding the provision of data to supplement the NCIS, including multiple ICD-10 cause of death codes, marital status, indigenous origin and period of residence in Australia.

Schedule 1 - NCCCI Membership

Chair - Professor Dennis Else

Chair, National Occupational
Health and Safety
Commission (NOHSC)

ORGANISATION	REPRESENTATIVE
Australian Coroners' Society	Mr Graeme Johnstone State Coroner, Victoria
Standing Committee of Attorneys-General (SCAG) - Secretariat	Laurie Glanfield Director General NSW Attorney-General's Department
Standing Committee of Attorneys-General (SCAG) – States/Territories	Ruvani Wickremesinghe (from April 2001)
Standing Committee of Attorneys-General (SCAG) – Commonwealth	Position currently vacant.
Health Departments – States/Territories	Ms Sue Cornes Manager Data Services Unit Health Information Centre Queensland Health
Health Departments - Commonwealth	Dr Wilawan Kanjanapan Assistant Director Information Development Section Population Health Division Department of Health and Aged Care
Police – States/Territories	Superintendent Ross Dwyer (from June 2001)
Police – Commonwealth	As for SCAG
Occupational Health and Safety Administrators' Group – States/Territories	Michael Little
Occupational Health and Safety Administrators' Group – Commonwealth	John Rowling (from June 2000) Assistant Secretary Safety and Compensation Policy Branch Dept Employment Workplace Relations and Small Business
Work Place Safety - National	Dr Tim Driscoll Head, Epidemiology NOHSC
Consumer Affairs – State/Territory	Ms Lois Goodes Manager, Policy Consumer and Business Affairs Victoria

ORGANISATION	REPRESENTATIVE
Consumer Affairs - Commonwealth	John Wunsch (from June 2000) Manager Safety Policy Unit Consumer Affairs Division Department of Treasury
Registries of Births Deaths and Marriages	Trevor Stacey Registrar NSW Registry of Births Deaths and Marriages
Australian Institute of Health and Welfare	Geoff Sims Head, Health Division Australian Institute of Health and Welfare (AIHW)
Transport Safety - National	Jon Henchy (from April 2001) Team Leader, National Statistical Coordination and Analysis Australian Transport Safety Bureau
Australian Bureau of Statistics	Brian Doyle Regional Director Australian Bureau of Statistics (ABS)
National Injury Surveillance Unit	Dr James Harrison Director Research Centre for Injury Studies (RCIS) Flinders University
MUNCCI	Professor Stephen Cordner Director, VIFM/MUNCCI