



NATIONAL CORONERS INFORMATION SYSTEM

BUSINESS PLAN

2006/2007

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Preface

The National Coroners Information System (NCIS) has now been in active operation for 6 years, with the national data collection commencing from 1 July 2000¹.

Over this period of time, activities surrounding the NCIS have focused on ensuring the quantity and quality of information in the database is maximized. While these important activities will continue, it has been recognized that the NCIS needs to look further into the future, to determine which strategic areas should be the focus of efforts and any developments in the short term.

Accordingly, the development of a strategic plan for the NCIS has been endorsed by the NCIS governing bodies as an initiative to be undertaken in 2006/07. Activities in the second half of 2006 will therefore include consultation and development of an NCIS strategic plan. Once developed, this new strategic plan should form a solid basis for influencing the NCIS business planning for 2007/08 and beyond.

In light of the above, the priority areas identified in the 2004-2006 Business Plan have been retained for the 2006/07 Business Plan, with many activities outlined in the 2004-2006 Business Plan to continue in the upcoming year.

There will of course be some new activities that are focused on in 2006/07, including items such as the development and implementation of a communications and marketing plan; discussions surrounding external funding for NCIS data entry resources, and the upgrade of the ICECI classification system.

As with every year, the success of meeting the objectives in 2006/07 will not be possible without State and Chief Coroners and their staff contributing to the NCIS, as well as the funding agencies which continue to support the core operations of the database. These funding agencies in 2006/07 are the Commonwealth Department of Health and Ageing; the Australian Safety and Compensation Council; the Australian Institute of Criminology; the Australian Transport and Safety Bureau; the Product Safety Policy section of the ACCC, and Justice Departments in each State and Territory.

The Victorian Institute of Forensic Medicine will also continue to manage the NCIS on behalf of the above funding agencies.

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¹ Queensland data commences from 1 January 2001.

Executive Summary

The National Coroners Information System (NCIS) continues to consolidate its position as a resource for death and injury prevention activities.

There are now over 110,000 deaths recorded on the NCIS, with usage by coroners, researchers and policy makers continuing to increase.

Core operational funding from the government has been confirmed until June 2009, and efforts in 2006/07 will continue to work towards enhancing the quality and quantity of core information on the NCIS. The NCIS will also be planning for future, with an NCIS strategic plan, and a marketing and communication plan to be developed during 2006/07.

The classification system which forms the basis of the NCIS coding (the International Classification for External Cause Injury, ICECI) will also be upgraded to the latest version, to ensure data coding used is comparable with international standards. The management of the NCIS will also be compared to the ISO9001 standard, with accreditation against this standard to be obtained, to ensure that all system stakeholders are being delivered the most effective service possible.

As in the 2004-06 Business Plan, the five priority areas for the NCIS in 2006/07 will be: data quality, data completeness; awareness and usage; stakeholder relationships and communication; and administration, due to the following reasons.

Data quality is vital for the NCIS as the value of the system is reliant upon data being correct and accurate. Without data quality, users will lose confidence in the system and it will be unable to be relied upon as a valuable death investigation tool.

Data completeness is a priority area for the NCIS as case identification is dependant on coding being complete, and third party users are unable to access identifying information about a case until it is closed. Timeliness of case closure is vital, as it results in complete information being available to all users. Contextual information concerning the circumstances of an incident are unable to be accessed if documents are not attached to cases, while externally provided codes will allow for full completion of the NCIS data set.

Awareness and usage is an important area, as one of the rationales for development of the NCIS was to create a resource to assist coroners, policy makers and researchers with their death investigation and injury prevention work.. It is therefore essential that information stored on the NCIS continues to be made accessible to stakeholders in the most appropriate form possible and that coding structures and interfaces are maintained so the system remains useful for data extraction purposes.

Stakeholder relationships and communication activities are particularly important due to the variety of parties which use, are impacted by, or are stakeholders in, the system. Funding agencies need to be shown that their support of the NCIS has been justified;

managers of coronial offices need a forum through which to discuss issues associated with NCIS data entry; and third party users need to be kept up to date about items that affect their use of the system.

Administration of the NCIS needs to be in a transparent and financially responsible manner and in accordance with the revised governance structure. IT Maintenance of the NCIS is also important, with a number of small maintenance projects to ensure the effective upload of data and documents from the various State/Territory and forensic offices around Australia.

Finally, management of NCIS personnel is a critical issue, to ensure staff with important corporate knowledge are retained, and provided with appropriate development and training opportunities to allow them to perform as efficiently and effectively as possible.

Vision Statement

To develop and maintain a high quality information service for coroners, policy makers and researchers to benefit the Australian community by contributing to a reduction in preventable death and injury.

Background Information

The idea for a national coronial database was first discussed in Australia over 15 years ago, however it was not until 1994 that action was taken towards realization of that idea. In that year, the Australian Coroners' Society (ACS) endorsed the recommendation of the Australian Institute of Health and Welfare that there be a national coronial database. In 1997, the Monash University National Centre for Coronial Information (MUNCCI) was formed. This was a consortium of three Monash University Departments being the Department of Forensic Medicine; the Department of Epidemiology and Preventive Medicine; and the Monash University Accident Research Centre.

With initial capital funding of \$165,000 each from Monash University and the Victorian Department of Justice, development of the system commenced in 1997. Since 1998, the Commonwealth Department of Health, other key Commonwealth agencies and each State/Territory Justice Department have provided significant annual funding contributions to assist with the ongoing development of the National Coroners Information System (NCIS).

Development of the system has seen new local case management systems developed and implemented in 6 of the 8 coronial jurisdictions, licence agreements signed with each of the participating jurisdictions, standardised classification systems developed, production of a data dictionary, design and maintenance of the NCIS web interface, and the development of protocols to allow access to the NCIS by third party users. The database was officially launched in August 2000, and all jurisdictions around Australia have come on-line and are now contributing data to the national coronial database.

Operations and Management Plan

During 2006/07, the five (5) priority areas for the NCIS will be:

- **Data quality**
Improving the accuracy of information coded on the NCIS
- **Data completeness**
Increasing the timeliness, completeness and volume of cases on the system; and their associated full text documents. Incorporation of externally provided coding structures.
- **Awareness and usage**
Improving coroners, policy makers and researchers knowledge, use and benefits from the system.
- **Stakeholder relationships/communication**
Ensuring all stakeholders, users, and interested parties are informed, aware, and where appropriate, involved, in decision making, developments and progress.
- **Administration**
Ensuring the NCIS operates within budget; operates within approved governance frameworks, and is compliant with the ISO9001 standard. Ensuring the IT data upload elements of the NCIS are as efficient and comprehensive as possible, and that the performance and professional development of all NCIS staff are managed in accordance with the Victorian Department of Justice performance management system.

DATA QUALITY

The importance of data quality for the NCIS cannot be underestimated. The value of the system is reliant upon data being correct and accurate. Without data quality, users will lose confidence in the system and it will be unable to be relied upon as a valuable death investigation tool.

Outcome

- To show a continual improvement in coding accuracy on the NCIS towards the coding target of 85% accuracy in critical fields.

Activities

- Provide coder training sessions for coders on updated ICECI classification
- Provide coder training sessions for new coders as required
- Audit closed cases uploaded to the NCIS each month
- Monitor and report on coding accuracy.
- Hold bi-annual teleconference with coders to discuss various coding issues
- Produce regular coding tips newsletters
- Conduct targeted quality assurance of 3 commonly coded fatality types (e.g., falls, MVAs etc)

Measures

See Annexure A. Table 1.

DATA COMPLETENESS

Issues concerning timeliness of data entry and case closure, document attachment rates and the provision of externally provided codes on the system all impact upon the usefulness of the NCIS. Case identification via field searches is dependant on coding being completed, and the majority of third party users are unable to access identifying information about a case until it is closed. Contextual information about the circumstances of an incident are unable to be accessed if documents are not attached to the system.

Outcomes:

- Increase in the timeliness of NCIS case closure across jurisdictions, with progress made towards agreed target of no more than 90 days between case completion by coroner, and completion of data entry.
- Addition of certain full text reports and codes to the NCIS not previously available.

Activities

- Conduct regular scheduled full uploads from each jurisdiction.
- Liaise and assist jurisdictions to improve case closure rates.
- Liaise with jurisdictions to facilitate the attachment of core documents not currently available on the NCIS.
- Investigate solutions surrounding minimal content of police narrative reports in SA.
- Progress discussions surrounding external funding for dedicated NCIS data coder/s (either full or part time) in various jurisdictions.
- Encourage and facilitate increased data entry and documentation for country cases.
- Add ABS codes for 2004 data into the NCIS.
- Add industry and occupation codes from Australian Safety & Compensation Council (ASCC) concerning work related deaths.
- Conduct feasibility study on uploading data from national police form for reporting death to a coroner into additional NCIS fields.
- Addition of Latitude and Longitude and Boundary Tagging for NCIS address details

Measures

See Annexure A. Table 2.

AWARENESS AND USAGE

The development of a national coronial database was undertaken to create a resource for coroners, policy makers and researchers to assist them with death investigation and injury prevention work. The NCIS aims to provide users with improved access to national coronial information about the frequency of certain types of death, the circumstances surrounding those deaths, and previous findings and recommendations. It is therefore essential that information stored on the NCIS continues to be made accessible in most appropriate form possible.

Externally provided codes from ABS and the Australian Safety and Compensation Council (ASCC) will enhance the value of the system to researchers, while the upgrading of the ICECI classification system to the latest version will ensure that the codes used on the NCIS remain comparable with the latest international coding schemes.

The development of a range of different ways in which users can choose to access NCIS data (email updates, geographical mapping, aggregate data cubes) will improve the flexibility of information delivery and presentation of coronial data for users.

Outcomes:

- Improved use by coroners, policy makers and researchers of the information contained within the NCIS.
- Improved awareness of the NCIS internationally.
- Improved accessibility to NCIS information in various forms.
- Increase in use by the medical profession/health industry.

Activities

- Develop and implement “automatic case notification” function to allow users to register to be made aware of new cases of interest added to the system.
- Make aggregate data available to users via data cubes, maps, graphs and/or tables using newly purchased analysis, mapping and geo-coding software.
- Update the ICECI Classification system on the NCIS to the most recent version.
- Update the coding of the “product related field” to improve identification of consumer related product hazards.
- Attend and present a paper at one international conference.
- Produce and distribute editions of Fatal Facts on a regular basis.
- Produce “broadsheets of interest” for all coroners around Australia, highlighting interesting trends/patterns, issue monitoring.
- Contribute an article about the NCIS for publication in the Australian Coroners Society Journal “InQuest”.
- Contribute an article to the publication, “VIFM Review” about the NCIS.
- Attend the 2006 Australasian Coroners Conference

Measures

See Annexure A. Table 3.

STAKEHOLDER RELATIONSHIPS AND COMMUNICATION

There are many varied parties associated with and/or interested in the NCIS. These include coronial offices, third party users, funding agencies, and the injury prevention community. As such, it is vital these relationships continue to be developed, and good communication between all parties encouraged and maintained. Funding agencies need to be shown that their support of the NCIS has been justified; managers of coronial offices need a forum to communicate any issues associated with NCIS data entry; and third party users need to be aware of issues that affect their use of the system, whilst having the opportunity to provide feedback.

Outcomes:

- Continued communications with coronial registrars; third party users and funding agencies.
- Input into NCIS strategic development received by a representative group of stakeholders
- Increased publication of NCIS information.

Activities

- Develop and implement an NCIS communication and marketing plan
- Day long workshop held to obtain stakeholder opinions for NCIS strategic plan
- Conduct bi-annual meetings with Coronial Managers.
- Conduct bi-annual meetings with the NCIS Advisory Group.
- Produce regular reports concerning data entry timeliness and coding accuracy for coronial managers, NCIS Governing bodies and users.
- Produce bi-annual editions of “NCIS News”, a newsletter concerning NCIS activities and information for third party users.
- Participate in Australian Mortality Data Interest Group meetings.
- Attend and present at the 2006 Australasian Injury Prevention Network Conference.
- Prepare an annual report of “NCIS statistics” outlining major aggregate mortality statistics for a calendar or financial year.

Measures

See Annexure A. Table 4.

ADMINISTRATION

The NCIS needs to be managed in a transparent and financially responsible manner in accordance with the governance structure. Due to upgrades in the version of the ICECI classification system used, relevant documentation for users and coders (data dictionary, coding manual etc) will need to be updated. ISO9001 accreditation will also be sought to ensure NCIS stakeholders can be confident of best practice procedures and processes surrounding management of the database.

The development of a strategic plan for the NCIS is also to be undertaken, to allow for improved planning and direction surrounding the system over the next 5 years.

Finally, technical maintenance of the NCIS is also important, and a number of small IT projects are scheduled to occur in 2006/07 for the improvement of data upload processes and NCIS maintenance.

Outcomes:

- NCIS operated within budget and NCIS operational and financial reports provided in accordance with the governance structure.
- Strategic plan developed
- Accreditation to ISO9001
- Small IT maintenance projects undertaken.

Activities

- Provide quarterly financial and operational reports to the NCIS Committee and bi-annual reports to NCIS Board of Management
- Produce and implement NCIS Business Plan for 2006/07.
- Produce 2005/06 Annual Report
- Develop NCIS Strategic Plan
- Update documentation such as data dictionary, coding manual, search manual, technical documentation in light of coding changes.
- Obtain ISO9001 accreditation
- Manage performance and professional development of NCIS staff in accordance with the Victorian Department of Justice performance management system.
- Conduct IT maintenance projects to:
 - update the NCIS interface to include extra fields to identify medical certificate cases; transferred cases; the date of coroners findings; and remove references to MUNCCI.
 - Convert all attached documents to PDF format
 - Rewrite scripts for upload from Victorian Case Management System
 - Automatically remove cases flagged as medical certificate cases.
 - Ensure uploads recognize null fields and remove spaces from free text fields.

- Upload “institution name” field from LCMS to improve address geocoding accuracy.
- Secure web data transfers related to queries performed on interface by authorized users.
- Increase size of police narrative documents from fixed size to unlimited.

Measures

See Annexure A. Table 5.

Financial Information

Government funding for 2006/07 Core Operations

	<i>Budget 2006/07</i>
CORE OPERATION BUDGET	
EMPLOYEE RELATED COSTS	
Salaries & Other Payroll Costs	315,950
Employee On Costs	71,184
TOTAL EMPLOYEE RELATED COSTS	387,134
GENERAL EXPENSES	
Travel & Related Expenses	17,810
Printing, Stationery & Other Office	8,000
Postage & Communication	8,000
Training & Development	19,500
Contractors/consultants	28,000
Finance & Admin Support Services	53,733
Utilities	8,190
IT Costs	
Database IT Support & Maintenance	238,565
Equipment replacement	6,000
Additional external licences	43,500
IT Support for NCIS staff	21,600
	452,898
TOTAL BUDGET	840,032

Separately funded projects

There are number of projects which have been separately funded which will be part of activities surrounding the NCIS.

Authorised Enhancement Projects

Work will continue on the following authorized enhancement projects in 2006/07:

- Geocoding NCIS address data
- Producing aggregate data in the form of maps, graphs, tables and data cubes
- Developing and implementing an automatic case notification system
- Upgrading the NCIS classification system (mentioned under the priority area of “Awareness and Usage”)
- Additional information capture about coronial recommendations

Authorised enhancement projects that will await the 2007/08 year before commencement are:

- Review and revision of NCIS search interface
- Trend analysis feasibility prototype

Funding source: Available funds from the NCIS budget as determined at the end of the 2004/05 financial year.

Drugs Module

The Drugs Module for Victorian data will have been implemented by mid to late 2006, so the remainder of the 2006/07 year will focus on facilitating access to this additional data by key users, to obtain feedback about its usefulness and success.

Based on the results of this feedback, the NCIS may prepare a business case to justify the national implementation of the drugs module. The funds for this national implementation would likely be sought from outside the existing NCIS core funding agencies, who have an interest in more detailed, national drug information.

Funding source: The groundwork for this project was funded by the Commonwealth Department of Health and Ageing from 2000 over 3 years.

The facilitation work proposed to be undertaken in 2006/07 will not require any additional funding.

Road Crash Fatality Database

The Australian Transport Safety Bureau (ATSB) has engaged the VIFM to maintain and code the National Road Crash Fatality Database, which involves coders using the full text documentation from the NCIS to code additional specifics surrounding the elements of road crash fatalities.

The NCIS will be the main contact for the ATSB in relation to this project, and will examine the possible integration of this additional data alongside the existing NCIS database.

Funding source: The Australian Transport Safety Bureau.

New Zealand Project

New Zealand is likely to engage the NCIS or the VIFM to assist in the customization, implementation and management of a national coronial database for New Zealand during 2006/07.

The NCIS is therefore likely to be involved in initial discussions with New Zealand to facilitate this agreement.

Funding source: The VIFM initially, which will be reimbursed by the New Zealand Government should the project proceed.

ANNEXURE A – NCIS MEASURES

Table 1. Measures for Data Quality

Data Quality – Measures	Achieved (Yes/No/Partially)
2 workshops held with coders to train in amendments to upgraded ICECI coding	
2 Coder teleconferences held	
2 Coding Tips Newsletters produced	
10 QA reports provided to coronial offices	
Targeted Quality Audits on 3 specific topic areas conducted	
Improvement in coding accuracy levels detected, with progress made towards reaching agreed target	
Bi-annual report produced summarizing results of quality assurance outcomes	

Table 2. Measures for Data Completeness

Note: It should be recognized that the achievement of the some of the measures outlined in Table 2 are contingent upon the co-operation of the various coronial jurisdictions, and technical availability of certain documents in an electronic form.

Data Completeness – Measures	Achieved (Yes/No/Partially)
3 full uploads completed for every jurisdiction	
Queensland autopsy; toxicology and finding documents available on the NCIS	
NSW toxicology reports available on the NCIS	
WA post mortem cover sheets available on the NCIS	
SA Post Mortem reports available on the NCIS	
Improved case closure and document attachment levels for country cases	
Have conducted discussions with a number of external agencies about possible funding for NCIS data entry resources	
Have discussed possible scenarios with SA Coroners Office about SA police reports	
Continued improvement in case closure timeliness with further progress made towards reaching agreed targets	
ABS codes on the NCIS for cases reported in 2004	
Industry and Occupation Codes on system from ASCC for 2003 cases onwards	
Test feasibility of automatic data extraction from national police	

forms for reporting of death using VIC and TAS forms	
Latitude and Longitude and Boundary Tags available for NCIS addresses	

Table 3. Measures for Awareness and Usage

Awareness and Usage – Measures	Achieved (Yes/No/Partially)
Automatic notification system developed and implemented	
Aggregate data made available to users via maps, data cubes, graphs and/or tables	
NOHSC Industry and Occupation at Incident Codes available on the NCIS	
ICECI Classification scheme updated on the NCIS	
Update of Product related field	
Article concerning the NCIS published in the “VIFM Review” journal	
2006 Australasian Coroners Conference attended	
Article concerning the NCIS featured in coronial publication ‘Inquest’	
Presentation made at an international conference	
4 editions of Fatal Facts published	
Production and distribution of at least 2 Broadsheets of interest	
Increase in awareness, usage and support from State/Territory WorkCover agencies	

Table 4. Measures for stakeholder relationships and communication

Stakeholder relationships and communication – Measures	Achieved (Yes/No/Partially)
Marketing and communication plan developed, endorsed and implemented	
Workshop for stakeholders concerning NCIS strategic plan	
2 meetings held with Coronial Managers	
2 meetings held with NCIS Advisory Group	
2 editions of NCIS News published	
Participation in at least 80% of Australasian Mortality Data Group meetings	
Attended and presented at the 2006 Australasian Injury Prevention Network Conference.	
Produced a bi-annual report on data entry timeliness and coding accuracy for coronial managers, NCIS governing bodies and users.	

Produced an “NCIS Mortality Statistics” annual report	

Table 5. Measures for administration

Administration – Measures	Achieved (Yes/No/Partially)
NCIS managed within budget and financial and operational reports provided in accordance with NCIS governance structure	
NCIS Business Plan for 2006/07 completed and endorsed	
NCIS 2005/06 Annual report produced	
NCIS Strategic Plan developed	
ISO Accreditation obtained (involving training records retained for staff; review of position descriptions; review and update of Standard Operating Procedure Manual; identification and documentation of core processes, policies, and work instructions)	
Staff performance and professional development managed in accordance with the Victorian Department of Justice performance management system.	
NCIS Documentation updated in line with ICECI update	
NCIS interface updated to include extra fields to identify medical certificate cases; transferred cases; the date of coroners findings; and remove references to MUNCCL.	
Convert all attached documents to PDF format	
Rewrite scripts for upload from Victorian Case Management System	
Automatically remove cases flagged as medical certificate cases.	
Ensure uploads recognize null fields and remove spaces from free text fields.	
Upload “institution name” field from LCMS to improve address geocoding accuracy.	
Secure web data transfers related to queries performed on interface by authorized users.	
Increase size of police narrative documents from fixed size to unlimited.	