

NCIS

NCIS News

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General Information

Welcome to the first edition of NCIS News (formerly known as MUNCCI Talk). It has been a time of many developments for the National Coroners Information System (NCIS) and the Monash University National Centre for Coronial Information (MUNCCI) since the last edition in Winter 2003.

Since that edition, we are pleased to announce that negotiations concerning ongoing governmental funding of the NCIS have been secured, a restructured governance structure for the system has been implemented and new staff appointed.

Staff Changes

Due to funding uncertainty surrounding the system, the appointment of a replacement manager for the NCIS was delayed until July 2004. We would like to announce that Jessica Pearse accepted the position of NCIS Manager, effective from 1 July 2004. Jessica has been a Senior Project Officer with the NCIS since February 2002 and has a background in Information Management. Thanks to Vicky Winship, VIFM IT Manager, who operated as the Acting Manager for the NCIS during the interim period after Kirsten Murray, the previous Manager, departed the NCIS in August 2003.

Sue Wood, Quality Assurance Officer, departed from the NCIS in June 2004. Sue was contracted to the NCIS through the National Centre for Classification in Health (NCCH), and has now relocated to Sydney for a great opportunity to further her career in the field of Health Information Management. One of Sue's lasting legacies to the NCIS will be her tireless work in conducting an entire audit of the NCIS data set of closed cases and we wish Sue well with her future endeavours. A replacement for Sue was appointed in August 2004, being Leanne Daking who was previously a Health Information Management Advisor at the Victorian Department of Health.

A new Quality Assurance Assistant has been with the NCIS since February 2004. Tony Chan has qualifications in IT, Physics, Electronics and Accounting and has been assisting with the quality assurance of the NCIS data.

Our two most recent appointments (made in November 2004) have been Karen Holley and Rebecca Thornton. Karen joins us as a part-time Administration Assistant, and Rebecca is our new Coronial Liaison Officer.

Funding

In 2003, efforts were undertaken to secure governmental funding for the operating costs of the NCIS. The original funding agreement with the State/Territory and Commonwealth Governments officially expired in June 2003 and concerned initial developmental funding for the NCIS. Since that time, much hard work, negotiation and discussion with the relevant governmental agencies has taken place and we are pleased to announce that the relevant funding bodies have accepted a proposal in which the NCIS operational costs will continue to be funded until at least the end 2005/06. The agencies which have agreed to continue to fund the operations of this national coronial database are:

- Each State/Territory Justice or Attorney-General's Department;
- The Commonwealth Department of Health and Ageing;

- The Australian Competition and Consumer Division;
- The Office of the Australian Safety and Compensation Council (previously NOHSC);
- The Australian Institute of Criminology.

We would like to thank each of these agencies for their vision and support in agreeing to continue to make the National Coroners Information System a world first resource for death and injury prevention work. We would also like to thank the efforts of the executive staff at the Victorian Institute of Forensic Medicine; the Victorian Department of Justice; the MUNCCI Board; the NCCCI and the various State and Territory Coroners who assisted us during this process.

New Governance Structure

As part of the new funding arrangement, the NCIS agreed to restructure its operations, with the management of the national system transferred from MUNCCI to the Victorian Institute of Forensic Medicine (VIFM) on 21 March 2005. This restructure will also mean a new identity for the NCIS, which became an official section of the VIFM and as such will no longer be affiliated with Monash University.

The team at the NCIS gratefully acknowledges all the hard work, effort and in-kind support that Monash, and in particular the three MUNCCI Consortium Member Departments (MUARC; the Department of Epidemiology and Preventive Medicine; and the Department of Forensic Medicine), have invested into the development of the system, as well as that of all the MUNCCI Board Members. The Monash Solicitors Office and Standing Committee on Ethics in Research Involving Humans (SCERH) have also provided invaluable support to the system since 1998. The support of the project by Monash University has allowed the development of the NCIS to take place. We would also like to thank the National Coordination Committee for Coronial Information (NCCCI), comprised of a variety of stakeholders and interested parties, for their efforts in guiding the NCIS through its initial developmental stages.

The new governance structure was implemented in late 2004 and involves an NCIS Committee comprised of representatives from VIFM, Injury Prevention and the Australasian Coroners Society. This Committee reports to the VIFM Council, which will in turn provide information to an NCIS Board of Management comprised of representatives from the funding agencies. The first NCIS Board Meeting is scheduled to take place on 8 April 2005.

Quality Assurance

Through all the changes outlined above, the Quality Assurance team of Sue Wood (and now Leanne Daking) and Tony Chan kept working away at helping to make the NCIS data the best quality possible.

Initial quality work focused on NCIS QA making any necessary corrections or amendments to the NCIS database directly, and this will continue to be done for all coronial cases on the system which had a closed status before the end of October 2003.

In parallel to this process, the NCIS QA team have also been reviewing the coding of cases closed since the start of November 2003 and rather than fixing the cases directly onto the NCIS, have been providing regular feedback reports to the jurisdictions for case amendments to be performed directly onto the local systems. This process has a two fold benefit; it means

the jurisdictions will be amending the records at the originating data entry point, so the data quality of the local systems will improve and be consistent with what is represented on the NCIS and the feedback process will hopefully provide ongoing training and education for coders in terms of data entry guidelines and processes. This ongoing feedback mechanism should hopefully reduce the number of coding errors detected over time.

This has already shown to be the case over the course of the 5 reports that have provided monthly back to the jurisdictions, beginning in November 2003. The overall coding error rate detected for closed cases in February 2004 was 8% lower than the figure in the November 2003 analysis. A big thanks to the coders for the enthusiasm and quick turnaround time in making these case record amendments.

Some other statistics you might be interested in:

- There are now over **89,000** cases on the NCIS
- **66%** of cases on NCIS have *Case Type – Completion* as 'Death due to Natural Causes', **33%** are due to 'External Causes' and **1%** are 'Unlikely to be known'
- Total Number of Recommendations: **288**
 - % of Recommendations due to Motor Vehicle Accidents: **36%**
 - % of Recommendations due to Medical / Surgical Care: **6%**
 - % of Recommendations due to Drownings: **15%**
 - % of Recommendations due to Hanging: **7%**

Document Attachment Update

South Australia:

Toxicology and Autopsy Reports: Work has progressed on the automatic upload function for attaching South Australian toxicology and autopsy reports. This is expected to be trialled in the next month and released early May 2005.

NSW:

Toxicology: Formal approval is currently being sought from the NSW State Coroner for direct upload of toxicology reports to NCIS. Once approval is granted, NCIS will then work with the Forensic Sciences (Toxicology) to obtain copies of the documents.

Police Narratives: NCIS are currently entering some of the police narrative backlog. Processes on how to attach police narratives are still under investigation by NCIS and the NSW police assisting the Coroner.

Queensland:

Findings, Toxicology and Autopsy Reports: NCIS are in the process of investigating the possibility of receiving copies of these reports.

Tasmania:

Autopsy Reports from Launceston General Hospital (LGH): Approval has been granted for these reports to be sent to the Tasmanian Coroners Office. NCIS are working with LGH and the Coroners office to set-up a system for transfer of the reports.

Western Australia:

Autopsy Reports: NCIS have begun initial investigations into receiving copies of a Summary Autopsy report.

NOTE: unless otherwise specified, it is expected that the availability of these documents once implemented will not be retrospective.

Closed Cases and Document Attachment Statistics

Source: NCIS

Date Extracted: 1st March 2005

Time Period : Case Year >= 2000

	Total Cases	Proportion Closed	% Findings Attached *	% Police Attached ^	% Tox Attached #	% PMs Attached +
NSW	27,054	71.45%	67.46%	53.67%	0.04%	75.87%
VIC	19,399	81.20%	96.62%	76.95%	99.84%	91.53%
QLD	12,556	56.85%	0.00%	65.14%	56.65%	0.00%
SA	17,057	93.25%	51.45%	99.92%	0.00%	0.47%
WA	6,667	64.59%	91.42%	91.42%	51.58%	1.2%
TAS	2,492	88.76%	75.78%	97.47%	76.41%	68.85%
NT	1,436	86.14%	98.87%	99.09%	42.33%	94.42%
ACT	1,453	80.25%	91.81%	75.64%	54.08%	91.25%

* Total Finding documents attached divided by No of Closed cases where finding procedure status = 3, 5 or 6

^ Total Police documents attached divided by Total Cases

Total Tox document attached divided by No of cases where Tox procedure status = 3, 5 or 6

+ Total Autopsy documents attached divided by No of cases where Autopsy procedure status = 3, 5 or 6

Procedure status:

3 – Completed, With Document

5 – Completed, Without Document

6 – Completed, Document Sent Directly

Recent NCIS Activities

7th Australasian Injury Prevention Conference

The 7th Australasian Injury Prevention Conference was held in Mackay, Queensland between 15-17th September 2004. The NCIS presented a short paper on the NCIS on the final day titled “The National Coroners Information System: Contributions to death and injury prevention”.

Coder Training Sessions

Since November 2004, Leanne Daking has provided refresher coder training sessions to coronial clerks around Australia. Clerks from ACT, NSW, WA, Tas and NT have already received the training sessions, with SA and VIC to follow in the next few months. This will hopefully reinforce correct coding practices and enhance the national consistency of NCIS coding.

Product Related Field

A survey was sent out in February this year to certain relevant third party organisations concerning the product related field on the NCIS. This field has historically proved problematic in terms of agreement on what should constitute a “product related” death, resulting in inconsistent coding. A Health Information Management student on placement at the NCIS undertook a review of the use of this field and has produced a report recommending some changes to the field and its definition so as to be more useful. The implementation of these recommendations will be considered in the near future.

National Police Form

Versions of the National Police form for the Reporting of Death to a Coroner are now being used in South Australia, the ACT, Northern Territory, and Tasmania. Victoria will recommend its implementation once some technology issues are addressed and NSW is currently considering its adoption.

In 05/06, the NCIS expects to investigate the feasibility of automatic data extraction from the fields contained on the new police forms, into the NCIS.

Recent Publications of Interest

An AIHW report released in 2003 examined the NCIS as an injury surveillance tool, particularly in terms of its coverage and data integrity in supporting injury prevention initiatives. This was achieved primarily by comparing it to the ABS Deaths Data Collection.

The report found that the NCIS was potentially very useful for injury prevention purposes because of the considerable detail available in the coded and text variables and in the attached text documents. However, there were still a number of limitations that need to be addressed.

The report can be accessed from:

<http://www.nisu.flinders.edu.au/pubs/reports/2003/injcat60.php>

Recent Practical Uses of the NCIS

Launch of a National Safety Campaign

A national safety campaign concerning working under vehicles was launched on February 18 this year by the Federal Minister for Ageing, Julie Bishop. This joint campaign by the Australian Department of Health and Ageing and the ACCC was prompted by new figures from the NCIS which showed that 19 home mechanics died in Australia over the past four years as a result of incidents associated with the incorrect use of jacks. As part of this campaign, a safety alert brochure has been produced and can be downloaded from the ACCC website.

TAFE Course for Farmers in ATV Safety

In July 2004, an accredited TAFE training course was developed in Tasmania for farmers, who can now enrol in the 3-tiered program to increase awareness and safety concerning

ATV use. To be provided by Stay Upright, figures from the NCIS helped build a case for the creation of this course when it identified 57 ATV related deaths had occurred in Australia since July 2000.

Increased Awareness – Blind/Curtain Cords

In July 2003, a request was made to the Research Centre for Injury Surveillance (RCIS) at Flinders University by the Commonwealth Health Department, to research the number of fatalities of infants and young children due to strangulation by blind or curtain cords. This request was prompted by a query to the Health Department by a parent who had lost a child under these circumstances. The RCIS was able to use the NCIS to identify a number of these cases. The frequency of these cases prompted the RCIS to lodge an Issue of Concern, which was subsequently passed along to all State and Chief Coroners around Australia. A brochure concerning Blind and Curtain Cord Safety was subsequently produced by the Commonwealth Consumer Safety Unit within Treasury and the Department of Health and Ageing.

In May 2004, the Blind Makers Association of Australia contacted the NCIS and requested de-identified case information concerning the nature of these fatalities, to present to their members at the Annual Conference. This material was used to reinforce to manufacturers the necessity of new regulations concerning blind manufacture.

“The NCIS has made our job of selling the need for a safety first approach to blind loops to our members, and they in turn to their staff and customers, much easier.”

Peter Schweinsberg
Safety Officer – Blind Makers Association of Australia
September 2004

Frequently Asked Questions

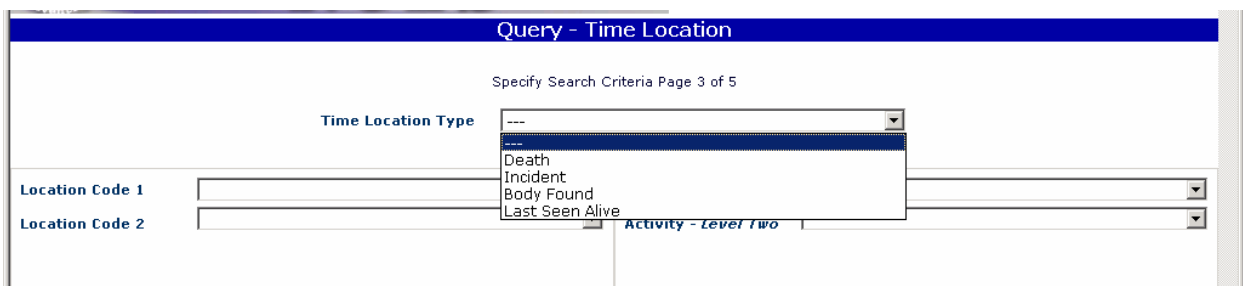
Q I keep getting duplicate rows/case numbers returned from my query design searches. Is it because cases are entered multiple times in the system?

A If you are continually returning duplicate records from a query design search (which have the same NCIS number), it is likely due to the way you have structured your query. Cases are not entered multiple times on the NCIS but there is a way you can avoid this issue.

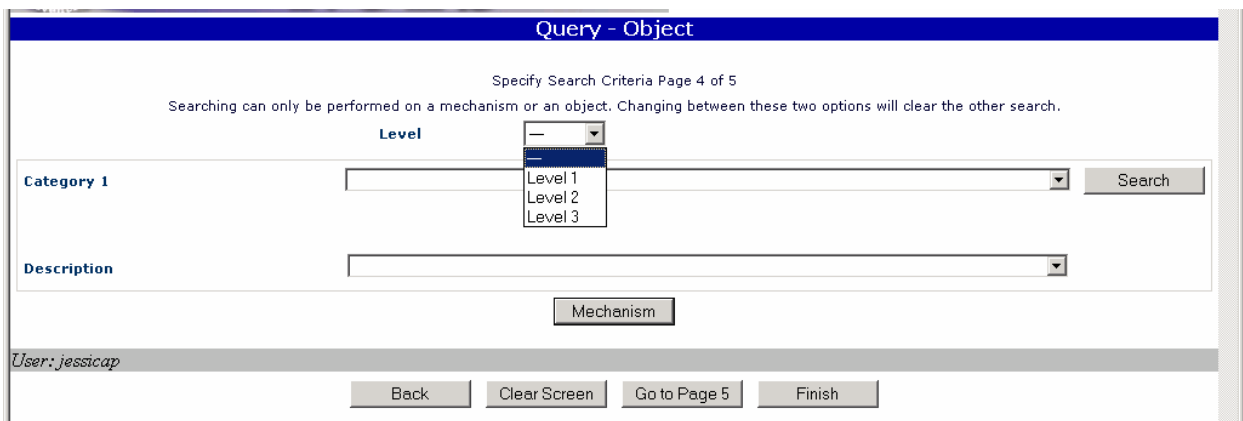
For two NCIS fields, there are multiple pieces of information that can be stored. These are the mechanism/object fields (as up to 3 mechanisms and objects can be coded for each case) and the time location field, where information about the incident, death, last seen alive and body found can all be coded.

Therefore, to avoid multiple hits for the same case from a query design search, if you are planning to return either of these fields (mechanism/object or time location), specify which type of information you want returned from those fields when building your query.

For example: On the Time Location Screen – select the Time Location Type you are interested in getting details about (in most cases this will be the Incident). Once you have done this, when you select the “PostCode – Time Location” field at the end of the Query Design screen, the system will know you only want postcode information about the Incident, and will therefore not also return additional time location information about the death, last seen alive or body found.



Mechanism/Object screen - Similarly, if you only want one row to be returned which details the first mechanism or object coded for a case, select LEVEL 1 from the Level field on the Mechanism/Object field. The system will then know you only want the first mechanism/object to be returned and will avoid duplicating the case.




NCIS Tips / Tricks



TIP: Finding location of keywords in a document

To quickly find the location of a keyword within a full text document on the NCIS

1. Once the document has been opened

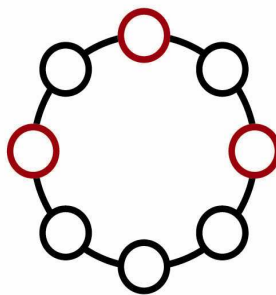
- For a word document - press CTRL + F on your keyboard.
- For a PDF – select the find icon on the Adobe Acrobat menu 

2. Type the word you are looking for in the dialogue box which appears and click on Find. This will then highlight the first instance of the keyword in the document.

3. To find further instances of the word in the document, click on Find Next or the Find Again Icon (next to the Find Icon on the Acrobat menu).  

Any comments or suggestions?

We welcome your input! If you have any comments on or suggestions for the content of NCIS News, please contact us. The next edition of NCIS News is scheduled for release in October 2005.



NCIS