

NCIS

NCIS News

Winter Edition 2006, Issue 3

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General Information

Budget for NCIS Confirmed for the Next 3 Years

At the recent Board of Management meeting held in April this year, the NCIS funding agencies agreed to continue to fund the NCIS for the next triennium (from July 2006 to June 2009).



The budget endorsed by the funding agencies is a slight increase on previous years' funding, to accommodate additional items such as external software licences, a minimal increase in staffing levels, and external consultancy services (legal advice, independent audit of accounts, marketing advice etc).

NCIS greatly appreciates the ongoing support that has been provided by the funding agencies. The agencies which will provide core operational funding for the NCIS from 2006/07 to 2008/09 inclusive are:

- The Justice Departments of each State/Territory
- The Commonwealth Department of Health and Ageing
- The Australian Institute of Criminology
- The Office of the Australian Safety and Compensation Council (known previously as the National Occupational Health and Safety Commission)
- The Product Safety Section of the Australian Competition and Consumer Commission

Student Placements

NCIS accepts third year students from the Health Information Management course at Latrobe University for student placements each year. Throughout the placement the student works on one main project as well as a variety of activities that assist the work of the NCIS team.

The addition of the ICD-10 Cause of Death codes to the NCIS was the inspiration for the latest student project – “ICD-10 Mortality Coding and its place within the NCIS: A Comparative Study.”

The aim of the study was to compare the ICD-10 codes obtained from the ABS to the medical cause of death listed on the NCIS.

The process involved physically reviewing and recoding a random sample of cases extracted from the NCIS and analysing the comparative results.

Just over 1000 cases were recoded, representing a sample of 1.8% of applicable cases. The final report is yet to be completed and NCIS looks forward to releasing the results of this study when all analysis is completed.

Upcoming NCIS Activities

Strategic Planning Process

A strategic plan for the NCIS is to be developed later this year, which will outline the major strategic directions for the NCIS over the next 5 years. The plan will be based upon input from a range of NCIS stakeholders including current third party users, interested parties (including international representatives), coroners, pathologists, researchers, government, NCIS funding agencies, and the Victorian Institute of Forensic Medicine (VIFM).

To gather all these opinions, a day long Strategic Planning workshop will be arranged, with stakeholders invited to attend the session to contribute their thoughts and ideas for the system in the near future.

Invitations to the workshop will be sent out in the coming months, but at this stage it is expected the workshop will be held on 1 September 2006 at the Novotel Brighton Beach in Sydney. We look forward to your attendance.

From this initial input, it is expected an NCIS Strategic Plan will be prepared and endorsed by the NCIS Board and Chief/State Coroners towards the end of 2006.

ISO 9000 Accreditation

As a section of the Victorian Institute of Forensic Medicine, the NCIS unit will be undertaking a process to become accredited under the ISO9000 system. This will ensure the existing procedures and practices of the NCIS unit are in accordance with best practice, and will provide further reassurance to NCIS users and funding agencies that the system is being managed effectively and efficiently.

An initial preliminary assessment is scheduled for 27 July 2006, with a final assessment for accreditation due later in the year.

NCIS Enhancement Projects Update

There are several projects which were approved last year by the NCIS Board which we believe will provide added functionality to the system. These include geocoding and mapping location data about deaths, the purchase of a tool to view and chart aggregate data from the NCIS, automatic notification of new cases of interest, and adding additional information about cases where the coroner has made recommendations. Below is an update on progress made on each of these projects, as well as some others that have been on the drawing board for a while.

Aggregate data tool

Purchase and installation of this software which sits over the top of the existing NCIS dataset has been completed. Over the coming months, NCIS staff will review the best uses of this new software, with the potential to make data cubes of aggregate coronial data available to the public via a web interface, or distribute aggregate tables/charts or maps to users. By the end of 2006, NCIS expects to have some of these value added features available to interested parties.

Geocoding and Mapping Address Data

A geocoding software program has been purchased by the NCIS, with the locations of the deceased's residence, incident address and death address currently stored on the NCIS to be geocoded to provide latitude and longitude co-ordinates, and boundary tags such as the relevant Local Government Area (LGA). These codes should be available on the NCIS by the end of 2006 to allow users to search on incidents, deaths or residents within a particular LGA region. Over the next 6 months, the geocoded addresses will also be used to produce a number of maps (of national, state and local areas) involving certain types of death which will be distributed to interested parties. In future, some of these maps may be available for users to produce/view online.

Automatic Notification of New Cases of Interest

This new enhancement will involve an email notification being automatically sent to authorised users who have registered an area of interest with the NCIS when a new case of interest is added or closed on the NCIS. IT specifications for this project have been developed with the notification service expected to be available to users in early 2007.

Extra Data Fields Regarding Coronial Recommendations

Investigation about additional fields that could be added to the NCIS to provide further information about coronial recommendations (eg. which agencies recommendations were sent to, what type of recommendation made, industry area etc) is currently being undertaken. These extra data fields could be added to the NCIS data set during 2007 if found to be of value to the majority of our users.

Victorian Drugs Module

Work on uploading additional information about Victorian drug related deaths from the Victorian Institute of Forensic Medicine toxicology laboratory is underway, with the additional information expected to be available to users by September 2006. Once the Victorian module is complete, NCIS will be asking users interested in drug related fatalities to review the extra data to determine if a case for national implementation can be made.



National Police Form for Reporting of Death



The national police form for reporting of death to a coroner is close to being implemented in Victoria, and a pilot is in the process of being arranged for NSW, Tasmania, SA, Queensland and the ACT are all already using the form in various ways. Once the form is implemented in Victoria, a feasibility study will be undertaken using the Victorian and Tasmanian forms to determine the ease of uploading extra information collected on the police notification form directly to the NCIS. It is expected the feasibility of this process should be known around 6 months after the Victorian form is implemented (which is expected to occur in the second half of 2006).

Codeset Upgrade

Many of the NCIS codesets are based on the International Classification of External Causes of Injuries (ICECI) as distributed by the World Health Organisation (WHO).

Since the NCIS was implemented WHO has released an updated version of the ICECI codesets and a project has commenced to implement, where necessary, the new codesets.

As with any standard codeset often the recommended codes do not cover all applicable scenarios and this is definitely the case in regards to NCIS data: for example with the current codeset the location of a nursing home requires coders to specify the location as an "Other Specified Hospital or other Health Service" and then use the free text field supplied to specify "Nursing Home".

Many of these scenarios have been addressed in the updated codeset however in some situations it may be necessary to add or remove codes from the ICECI codeset to ensure that the types of cases held within the NCIS and the needs of NCIS users are best met.

As part of the project an analysis has been undertaken on the data entered into free text fields entered for following codesets:

- Mechanism of Injury
- Object or Substance Producing Injury
- Incident Activity Details
- Location (Body Found, Last Seen Alive, Incident and Death)
- Mode of Transport
- Counterpart
- Context

Common terms used in each of these codeset will be considered for inclusion to the NCIS classification. Where these codes are additional to the specified ICECI codeset, measures for the mapping of the codes will be prepared.

It is anticipated that the full ICECI upgrade will be implemented by the end of the 2006-07 financial year.

A consultative group will be formed to assess the validity of both the ICECI codesets and recommendations made by the NCIS Quality Manager. It is envisaged that invitations to sit on the consultative group will be sent to interested parties in the coming weeks.

Anyone interested in the project should contact Leanne Daking (NCIS Quality Manager) on 03 9684 4458 or leanned@vifm.org.

Timetable for NCIS Developments

Item	Expected Completion Date
Aggregate data tool	December 2006
Geocoding and mapping address data	December 2006
Automatic notification of new cases of interest	Early 2007
Extra data fields regarding Coronial recommendations	2007
Victorian drugs module	September 2006
National Police form for reporting of death	June 2007
Codeset upgrade	June 2007

Quality Assurance

The review of the coding of closed NCIS cases and the provision of training and documentation to improve and maintain acceptable coding accuracy has remained a priority for the Quality Assurance team.

Case Review

The QA team has caught up with the backlog of closed cases on NCIS to be quality assured, with the QA reviews each month now examining all cases closed in the previous month. Reports up to May 2006 will be distributed to Coronial Offices before the end of the financial year.

The process of the quality reviews is two-fold:

1. Closed cases for a specific month are reviewed by the QA team generating a statement of cases accepted and rejected throughout the QA process; and
2. Monthly QA Report is produced and distributed to applicable jurisdictions.

It should be noted that QA performed by NCIS only identifies coding discrepancies. These discrepancies are then noted in a QA report which is provided back to the respective Coroner's offices requesting coding amendments to be made. This process increases the clerks' coder education and ensures corrections are made on the local case management system. However, as the NCIS team does not make corrections to the system it cannot be guaranteed that because a case has been quality checked, coding errors will be immediately rectified.

Future QA Work

The focus of the QA Team will now move to verifying that amendments detailed in the QA Reports provided to the respective Coroners' Offices are actually being made in the local case management systems (LCMS). Where necessary follow-up reports will be forwarded to jurisdictions for action.

Statistics below give an accurate reflection of the case review workload of the QA Team since September 2005.

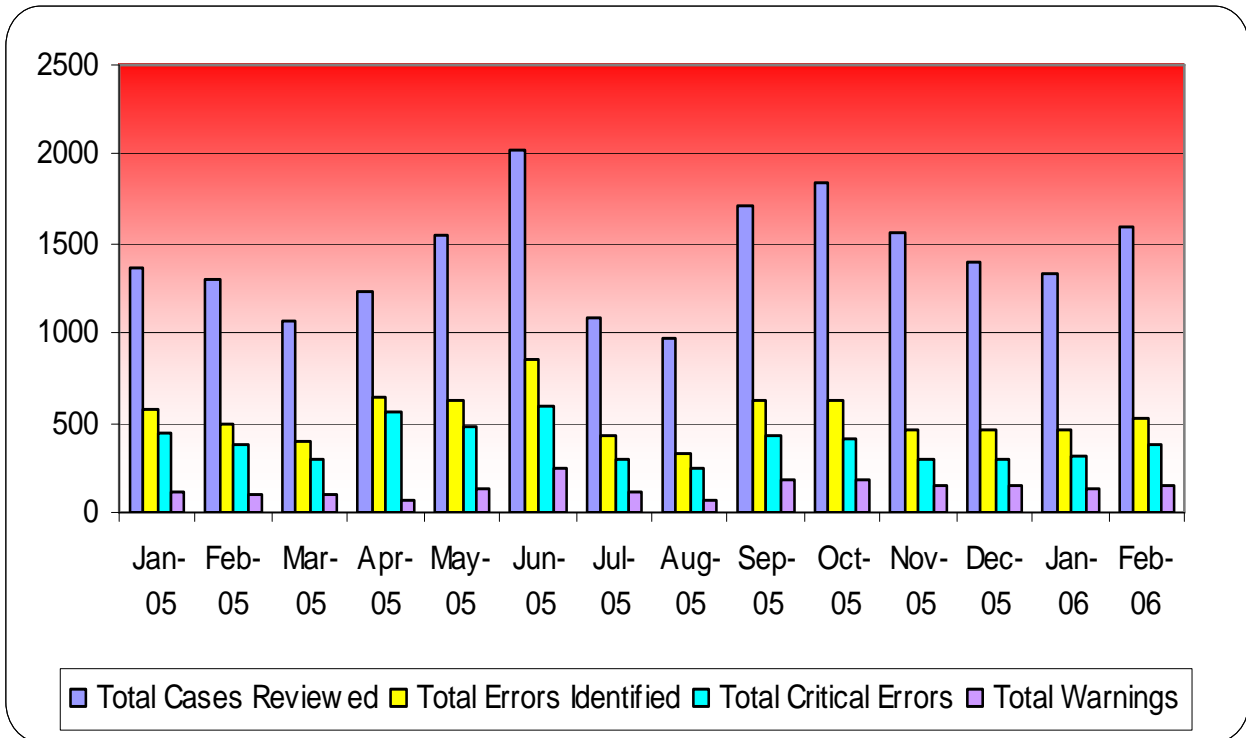
Quality Statistics as at June 2006

Total Cases held in NCIS:	113,107
Total Closed Cases:	89,856
Total Closed Cases Reviewed:	87,748
% of Closed Cases Reviewed:	97.65%
Total Closed Cases Reviewed between September 2005 and May 2006:	17,192

Reports produced from January 2005 to February 2006:

Total Cases Reviewed:	20,005
Total Errors Identified:	7,491
Total Critical Errors Identified:	5,436
% where any error identified:	37.45%
% of Critical Error Cases:	27.17%

Quality Analysis for cases closed between Jan 2005 and Feb 2006



Amendment of the errors is a vital step in the QA process and the NCIS Team appreciates the efforts of all those coders helping to ensure that the data held within NCIS is optimal.

NCIS Coder Training

NCIS Coder Training has remained a priority of the Quality Assurance team and where necessary additional training sessions have been organised to ensure that all coronial staff responsible for NCIS coding receive the desired level of training and support.

The rotational nature of many of the coronial court systems result in a consistent flux of staff responsible for the NCIS data entry, coding and revisions. With each rotation it is often necessary to conduct a training session and where possible staff from multiple courts and jurisdictions are trained in the same session in an effort to limit expenditure and time allocation for the sessions.

Since September 2005 five separate training sessions have been held in four jurisdictions. In all, a total of 21 coders were introduced to NCIS or given adequate refresher training to hone existing coding skills.

While various alternatives for the face-to-face training session are being investigated by the NCIS team, for the near future it is likely that these training sessions will be required to ensure a high standard of data is available for use from the NCIS.

Any jurisdiction that would like to discuss a training session should contact Leanne Daking on leanned@vifm.org or (03) 9684 4458.

Document Attachment Update

South Australian toxicology reports are continuing to come across steadily. However, due to some technical difficulties in automatically attaching the reports, the transfer of autopsy reports has been stopped temporarily. We hope to have things back in order shortly.

The NCIS team is still progressing the attachment of Queensland findings. The process for obtaining these documents has taken longer than expected due to unforeseen IT complications at the QLD end, and we will be continuing to try to obtain them as soon as possible. Efforts are also underway to obtain the Queensland toxicology and autopsy reports for the NCIS.

Launceston autopsy reports are now being regularly attached to the system. This will improve the amount of case information available for Tasmanian cases.

The investigation into obtaining NSW toxicology reports is also progressing. NCIS is in the final stages of negotiating the transfer of the documents with the Western Sydney Area Health Services IT section. We hope to have the documents successfully coming across in the next few months.



Don't forget that statistics on the percentage of documents attached by state are available on the NCIS website, which are updated quarterly. The statistics also include the number of open and closed cases by state. Go to http://www.ncis.org.au/web_pages/statistics.htm and click on the 'Documents Attached and Case Status (Open & Closed) Statistics' link.

NCIS Awareness Activities

To promote the benefits of the NCIS and increase the number of users accessing the system, the NCIS regularly visits the jurisdictions to provide information about the NCIS and to demonstrate how to search the system effectively.

In October of last year, Jessica and Megan travelled to South Australia to provide training to the Coroner's Court and SA Department of Health.

In November, Megan journeyed up to Brisbane to attend the Australian Mortality Data Interest Group Meeting. While there, she met with Queensland Coroner's staff and provided

an information session for Dr Majed As'ad from the Jordanian Ministry of Health and Christine Fowler, New Zealand Health Information Service.

In May, Megan visited NSW to provide some training to Coroner's clerks and researchers on using the NCIS. She also held an information session for the NSW Homicide Unit on potential benefits of the NCIS to their organisation.

Jessica will be in Queensland in June conducting awareness sessions with the ABS, Queensland Fire and Rescue, and the Australian Institute for Suicide Research and Prevention.

We have also recently compiled a new NCIS Quick Search Guide for our users. This guide will be posted on our website in the next few weeks, but please contact Megan on 03 9684 4485 if you would like to receive a hard copy.

Coroners' Survey Results

The NCIS recently conducted a survey of Coroners and Coronial clerks in each jurisdiction. 40.4% (19 out of 47) of invitees responded, 7 of which were Coroners. The three most common reasons reported for using the NCIS were to find the frequency of certain types of incidents (40% of respondents), followed by finding recommendations (30%) and to find a single case (16.7% of respondents).

There was strong agreement that the system was useful (94% agree or strongly agree) and a valuable tool for injury prevention and/or research (79% - agree or strongly agree). One area identified for improvement included better user information to assist infrequent users in conducting searches of the database. A suggestion was also made to produce monthly reports to each jurisdiction on the types of deaths that have been recorded.

In response to the first issue, a Coroner's search brochure was developed to assist our users in conducting searches using the NCIS 'Query Design' search screen. This is the most efficient and powerful NCIS search screen, but appears to be the least used (only 4 of the 19 respondents regularly used it) – most likely due to its complexity. The second suggestion is also currently being investigated.

A similar survey will be conducted for third party users in the near future. If you are a third-party user who is interested in participating or you are a Coroner or Coronial staff member who did not get an opportunity to participate in the first survey, please send your details and any comments to meganb@vifm.org.

Coronial Findings on Court Websites

Each State and Territory Coroner's Office now makes select Coronial findings available on their information websites. These sites are maintained by the individual jurisdictions. While the findings will be available on the NCIS and will also be summarised in future Fatal Facts editions (if they contain recommendations), direct access to the findings via the Coroner's Office website can be a useful resource to examine major recent findings made in each State. The table below provides hyperlinks to Coronial findings in each jurisdiction.

Jurisdiction	Hyperlink	Web address
Australian Capital Territory	Findings	http://www.courts.act.gov.au/magistrates/crt-coroner.html
New South Wales	Findings	http://www.lawlink.nsw.gov.au/lawlink/coroners_court/ll_coroners.nsf/pages/coroners_findings
Northern Territory	Inquest Findings	http://www.nt.gov.au/justice/graphpages/courts/inquestlist.shtml
Queensland	Findings	http://www.justice.qld.gov.au/courts/coroner/findings.htm
South Australia	Findings	http://www.courts.sa.gov.au/courts/coroner/findings/content.html
Tasmania	Findings	http://www.magistratescourt.tas.gov.au/divisions/coronial/findingsdecisions
Victoria	Findings of Public Interest	http://www.coronerscourt.vic.gov.au
Western Australia	Inquest Findings	http://www.coronerscourt.wa.gov.au/C/coroners_inquest_findings.aspx?uid=9349-4756-3915-2531

Recent NCIS Training Activities

NCIS Staff have been busy training users since the last edition of NCIS News in Spring 2005. Some recent training sessions have included:

- Face to face training with:
 - NSW Department of Health
 - NSW Injury Risk Management Research Centre
 - NSW Maritime
 - National Drug and Alcohol Research Centre
 - Australian Consumer and Competition Commission
 - Drug and Alcohol Strategy Unit of Victoria Police
- Informal (via telephone or e-mail) training with:
 - Dr Kathlyn Ronaldson, Department of Epidemiology and Preventive Medicine
 - Dr Marianne Wyder, Australian Institute for Suicide Research and Prevention

Recent Research Requests

The NCIS regularly completes research requests on behalf of clients in Coroners' offices around Australia, government departments, academia, not-for-profit organisations and the media. The table below outlines some recent research requests of interest.

TOPIC	CLIENT
Horse related deaths of children under 18	Graeme Johnstone, Victorian State Coroner
Indigenous deaths in NSW	Don McLennan, Coronial Manager, NSW
Deaths relating to Oxycodone	Paresa Spanos, Victorian Coroner
Deaths of patients of a particular mental health facility	Audrey Jamieson, Victorian Coroner
Motorised scooter deaths	Graeme Johnstone, Victorian State Coroner
Party drug deaths	Mark Buttler, Herald and Weekly Times
Gamma hydroxybutyrate (GHB) deaths	Graeme Johnstone, Victoria State Coroner
External cause deaths in the City of Melbourne	Kerry Hylton, City of Melbourne
Transport related deaths in inner Melbourne	Graeme Johnstone, Victorian State Coroner

If you wish to obtain a copy of any of these research reports, please contact Stephen Morton at stephenm@vifm.org or on 03 9684 4442.

Frequently Asked Questions

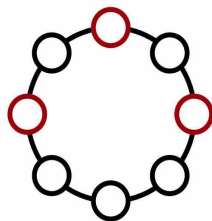
Q Why is the ABS data not available for all cases on the NCIS?

A

- At present, the NCIS only contains ABS codes for cases reported to a Coroner between 1 July 2000 and 31 December 2003 (1 January 2001 to 31 December 2003 for QLD cases).
- Within the set of cases with ABS codes from 2000 to 2003, for Tasmanian cases there are some time periods when no or limited codes were available from the ABS. This applies to cases from 2000 (Tasmanian registry data was entered manually into the ABS system prior to 2001, so there were no names in the ABS system to use as a basis for matching to the NCIS record) and 2001 (the ABS were only able to locate Tasmanian registry files for 9 of the 12 months for 2001 deaths).
- NCIS only receives codes once the ABS mortality coding has been completed and released, and matching of ABS and NCIS data has been performed. This typically means ABS codes are not available until 18 months after closure of that year's data by the ABS. For example, codes for 2004 cases should be available around July 2006.

Any comments or suggestions?

We welcome your input! If you have any comments, or suggestions for the content of NCIS News, please contact us. The next edition of NCIS News is scheduled for release in late 2006.



NCIS