



**Monash University National Centre for
Coronial Information**

developing and managing the

National Coroners Information System

ANNUAL REPORT

1 July 2001 - 30 June 2002

MUNCCI

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Table of Contents

1. Preface	ii
2. Executive Summary	iv
2.1 Major Achievements.....	iv
2.2 Review Against Operational Objectives, Business Plan 1999 – 2002..	vi
2.3 Review against objectives identified for 2001/2002.....	vii
2.4 Objectives for 2002/2003	viii
3. MUNCCI Board and Staff	1
3.1 Board of Management.....	1
3.2 NCIS Project Team	2
4. National Coordination Committee for Coronial Information (NCCCI)	4
5. MUNCCI Activities	5
5.1 Technical Development and Implementation	5
5.2 National Death Investigation Form	6
5.3 Drugs Enhancements Project.....	7
5.4 Water-Related Deaths Data	8
5.5 Research Activities.....	9
5.6 Quality Assurance	10
5.7 Access Regime	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
7.4 In-kind Support.....	14
Schedule 1 - NCCCI Membership	15

1. Preface

I am pleased to present MUNCCI's fourth annual report which outlines the progress made by MUNCCI in managing the National Coroners Information System (NCIS) over the period 1 July 2001 to 30 June 2002. The last 12 months has been a challenging time for MUNCCI. The developmental funding was due to expire on 30 June 2002 at which time, the NCIS was expected to become a self funding body. This deadline loomed large at a time when the MUNCCI team were making significant progress with a new team in place and a focus on improving the quality and completeness of the data on the NCIS. Acknowledging at this critical time that the NCIS was not able to position itself commercially, the MUNCCI team sought government funding for a fourth and final year to ensure that at the end of June 2003, the NCIS will be a saleable product.

MUNCCI's success to date in developing and implementing the NCIS is largely due to the continued support and goodwill, not only of Australia's coroners but also of the Departments of Justice around Australia, and particularly, the Standing Committee of Attorneys-General (SCAG). The NCIS has always seen its role as providing an invaluable public service. Up until now, it has been able to do this as a result of the financial support it has received from both state and commonwealth government agencies.

As many of you are aware, MUNCCI was originally funded by a range of public sector agencies pursuant to the 3 year national funding strategy developed by the National Coordinating Committee for Coronial Information (NCCCI) and endorsed by SCAG in July 1999. The funding strategy was for the years 1999/2000, 2000/2001 and 2001/2002 and was designed to ensure that the NCIS was fully implemented. Funding provided in 1999/2000 and 2000/2001 was considered developmental funding.

I am well aware that SCAG and others involved in the project fully expected the NCIS to be self funding by 1 July 2002, however as a result of a number of factors, MUNCCI was required to ask SCAG to extend the original funding arrangement until 30 June 2003. There are two main reasons for this:

1. The cultural, administrative and consequential resource developments in Coroners' offices have taken longer than anticipated. This is not a matter that is within the control of MUNCCI. Although there have been recent substantial improvements, complete submission of all cases to the NCIS are not currently occurring in the timely and comprehensive fashion required. This of course is a pre-requisite to any ability of MUNCCI to charge fees for access by third party users and stakeholders; and
2. The privacy climate has been warming up but at different rates in different jurisdictions. Dealing as we do with 8 jurisdictions, this is a significant complexity. Approaches to the NCIS for national data require the NCIS to negotiate these 8 different regimes. The workload associated with this was not , and realistically could not have been, completely anticipated.

After June 2003, the NCIS will not be seeking the further assistance of SCAG in relation to the developmental funding of this project. We will however seek SCAG's support to ensure that each jurisdiction is in a position to provide the information required to maintain the NCIS. MUNCCI, together with the NCCCI is continuing to develop its own strategy to secure the funding of this project beyond July 2003.

As you will note from the Executive Summary, the achievements over the last 12 months have been of significant importance to the ongoing viability of the NCIS. Amongst the key achievements over the last 12 months are the following:

- An extension of the national funding arrangement until 30 June 2003 (as mentioned);
- The systematic implementation of the *NCIS Quality Assurance Plan* resulting in a large increase in the quality and completeness of cases on the NCIS and the reduction of the large case backlog ;
- The development and delivery of training programmes for both categories of NCIS users, namely death investigation staff and third party users, to enhance usage and understanding;
- The endorsement by a number of police commissioners of the National Death Investigation Form for police investigation of coronial deaths, and the agreement by Victoria Police to conduct a pilot of the National Police Form in October 2002 for 3 months.

The last 3 years has seen enormous growth in MUNCCI. Despite significant operational difficulties, MUNCCI has developed a system that provides a sound and practical basis for the NCIS to contribute to death and injury prevention. It is insufficiently appreciated that one of the side benefits of MUNCCI and the NCIS has been the delivery to every jurisdiction (other than NSW and Victoria, which were already computerised) of an electronic case management system customised for local use. Now that the NCIS is operational, MUNCCI is constantly developing ways to improve data quality to ensure the data meets stakeholders' and users' expectations. The NCIS has been accessible by third party users since July 2001. As a result, quality of the data is now a focus for MUNCCI. Once the quality issues are adequately addressed, the NCIS will be well placed to establish itself as an essential and unique injury and death prevention tool, both nationally and overseas.

It is right and proper that in this Annual Report, I acknowledge the leadership and work of Rebecca Smith and the tremendous efforts of the whole MUNCCI team. Their commitment is a pleasure to see and be a part of. Finally, I would like to publicly thank Jennifer Neame for holding the show together after the departure of Jessica Lightfoot in April 2001 and the arrival of Rebecca Smith in September 2001.

STEPHEN CORDNER, DIRECTOR, MUNCCI, PROFESSOR OF FORENSIC MEDICINE, MONASH UNIVERSITY, DIRECTOR, VICTORIAN INSTITUTE OF FORENSIC MEDICINE, PROFESSOR OF FORENSIC MEDICINE, MONASH UNIVERSITY

2. Executive Summary

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

2.1 Major Achievements

- Obtained an extension of the original funding strategy co-ordinated by the Standing Committee of Attorneys-General (SCAG) for the continued development and maintenance of the NCIS for the period 2002/2003;
- As part of the strategy to secure ongoing funding, commenced the development of a user pays system to commence on 1 July 2003;
- Commenced a complete quality audit of the database
- Commenced a privacy audit of the database in response to new privacy legislation;
- Provided authorised access to all nominated death investigation staff including coroners; clerks; coroners/police assistants/; forensic, medical, and scientific staff; and coroners' researchers across Australia;
- Completed and implemented NCIS Version 2;;
- Commenced technical development of NCIS Version 3;
- Queensland on-line and contributing data to the NCIS from September 2001;
- Continued identification of strategies to improve the quality and quantity of data on drug-related deaths in conjunction with the Commonwealth Department of Health and Ageing, Drug Strategy Unit;
- Finalisation of National Police Form for the Investigation of Coronial Deaths in conjunction with the Commonwealth Department of Health and Ageing, Injury Prevention Unit;
- Obtained endorsement of the National Police Form by a number of Police Commissioners across Australia;
- Obtained funding in January 2002 to implement phase 2 of the 2 phase process to implement the National Police Form;
- Commenced coding and systems analysis in relation to the defined set of NCIS enhancements captured in the new National Police Form;
- Obtained agreement from the Victorian Police Commissioner, to conduct a pilot of the use of the National Police Form in two stations in Victoria;
- Developed an appropriate methodology for secure and regular information transfer. To date, two jurisdictions have begun using this new protocol;
- Implemented database restructure and hardware upgrade to ensure timely upload of information;
- Conducted numerous upgrades to the Local Case Management Systems developed by MUNCCI to increase functionality for the individual jurisdictions;
- Redesigned Local Case Management Software systems into a single program that caters for the needs of each jurisdiction;

- Improved documentation for all technical and operational aspects of the NCIS including the LCMS, help desk, central database structure, web interfaces and transfer protocols;
- Commenced a nationwide analysis of all data entry processes resulting in the identification of issues for which solutions are being, or have been, developed and implemented;
- Finalisation and systematic implementation of the *NCIS Quality Assurance Plan* since November, 2001;
- Development of a number of reporting scripts to enable regular monitoring of the quality and quantity of information in the database;
- Significant clearance of data entry backlog in a number of jurisdictions;
- Development of a new NCIS search screen designed specifically to encourage coroners' use of the NCIS.
- Development of a training program for Coroners in use of the NCIS;
- Development and delivery of training program to third party users of the NCIS;
- Development and delivery of specialised training programs to death investigation staff;
- Streamlining of help desk function by the development of an electronic log to record and track status of all help desk calls;
- Provision of prompt and effective help desk support for coronial data entry staff and third party users;
- Surveyed all current third party users to identify areas for improvement and to provide the foundation for development of the user pays funding model;
- Completed restructure of MUNCCI team within budget and in line with identified needs and skill base;
- Development of a new regular publication for Coroners called "Fatal Facts" that will provide a summary of recent findings categorised by topics;
- Updating of supporting documentation where required (including *NCIS Data Dictionary*, *NCIS Coding Manual*, *NCIS Search Manual*);
- Development and publication of monthly newsletter "Coding Tips" to compliment the Data Dictionary and Coding Manual used by data entry staff nationwide;
- Three (3) year contract continued 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;
- Provision of a research service where appropriate;
- Provision of regular data downloads to the Australian Bureau of Statistics to assist in their task of cause of death coding and reduce their need to visit the individual coroners' officer;
- As at June 30 2002, 65 third party applications received;
- As at June 30 2002, 150 Death Investigation staff NCIS access approved

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 these objectives is set out below.

▪ Objective 1 – Full implementation by 30 June 2000.

All States and Territories including Queensland are on-line and contributing data to the NCIS.

▪ Objective 2 – Licence Agreements in place by 30 June 2000

The template Licence Agreement drafted with the assistance of the New South Wales Crown Solicitor's Office and approved by the Standing Committee of Attorneys-General has been executed by the relevant authority in each participating State and Territory except Queensland. The Queensland Department of Justice has proposed a number of amendments to the Agreement that are currently being negotiated.

▪ Objective 3 – Third Party Access

The template Access Rules, drafted in consultation with State and Territory Coroners were approved by the Standing Committee of Attorneys-General in July 2000. These Rules provide the basis for Third Party Access to the NCIS that commenced in May 2001. All such applications are considered by the MUNCCI Research Committee, the Standing Committee on Ethics in Research Involving Humans (Monash University) and the Western Australian Coronial Ethics Committee (where required). All authorised third party organisations sign an Access Agreement that includes Schedule 8, NCIS Privacy Protocols. All nominated users are required to enter into a Confidentiality Undertaking.

▪ Objective 4 – Privacy and Ethics

The NCIS Privacy Protocols were finalised and included in the template Access Agreement signed by all authorised third party organisations. This Agreement is entered into once the application has been approved by the required Ethics Committees (see objective 3, above). MUNCCI provides secretariat support for this process at all levels.

▪ Objective 5 – Security

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

An appropriate methodology for secure and regular information transfer of information from the jurisdictions has been developed. To date, two jurisdictions have begun using this new protocol.

▪ Objective 6 – Administrative

Each jurisdiction with a MUNCCI case management system (CMS) as been provided with User Manuals that are updated as required. A Senior Project Officer was appointed to MUNCCI in February 2002 as a result of the identification of the need to provide some assistance to the jurisdictions in the data entry process. While MUNCCI acknowledges that the primary responsibility for the provision of data to the NCIS lies with the individual

jurisdictions, MUNCCI sees it as crucial to the ongoing success of the NCIS to provide appropriate guidance and solutions where possible. The work of the Senior Project Officer to date has identified a number of issues in the data entry process, and MUNCCI has begun developing strategies to improve this process. MUNCCI has also appointed temporary staff in an effort to assist a number of the jurisdictions with data entry backlog.

Prompt and effective Help Desk support for participating coronial offices and NCIS users has continued. The help desk function has been further enhanced by the development of an electronic log to record and track status of all help desk calls. Assistance is provided promptly and problems usually resolved within the hour. More complex problems are identified and logged for resolution by the most appropriate MUNCCI staff member as soon as practicable. MUNCCI has merged its IT staff with that of the Victorian Institute of Forensic Medicine to ensure MUNCCI has access to sufficient IT support and to reduce the overall risk of single staff member loss. Prior to this move, MUNCCI had the services of one programmer. It now has the services of 2 programmers and an IT Manager.

Training has been provided to MUNCCI staff in the areas of programming, web design, powerpoint presentations, structured query language (SQL), leadership and communication skills.

▪ **Objective 7 – Financial Management**

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

It was expected that by 30 June 2002, the NCIS would be operating on a self funding basis. As a result of a combination of factors, including the complexities of the project, the need to co-ordinate 8 coronial jurisdictions in the input of data and each of the different privacy regimes that now exist around Australia, MUNCCI was unable to meet this deadline. Accordingly, an extension of the original 3 year funding strategy for a further 12 months was sought and approved by the Standing Committee of Attorneys-General (SCAG). MUNCCI will make the transition from government funding to a user pays system by 30 June 2003.

In order to make this transition, the identification of third party usage needs and patterns has continued and a consultant has been engaged to work with MUNCCI staff in the development of a fee-for-service model which will be considered by the NCCCI by the end of October 2002.

2.3 Review against objectives identified for 2001/2002

In our last annual report we identified the following objectives, all of which have been achieved or are ongoing:

- Implement *NCIS Quality Assurance Plan* to maximise data quality;
- 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;
- Implement NCIS version 3;
- Strengthen relationships with international coronial centres, in particular New Zealand and Canada.

2.4 Objectives for 2002/2003

In addition to continuing the work involved in some of the ongoing objectives outlined above, the following objectives have been identified:

- Develop viable long term funding strategy including fee-for-service;
- Implement enhancements to the NCIS to provide for additional variables based on the data items in the new National Police Form;
- Continue to systematically implement the *NCIS Quality Assurance Plan*;
- Complete privacy audit of NCIS and develop new policy/statement in response to new legislation;
- Finalise MUNCCI/NCIS Security Procedures Manual;
- Further enhance help desk function to allow for automatic email notification;
- Develop research policy and provide research service within approved guidelines;
- Continue to work with jurisdictions' toxicology offices, the Department of Health and Ageing (Drug Strategy Unit) and the Inter-Governmental Committee on Drugs to assist in securing funding for the implementation of proposed drugs enhancements;
- Strengthen relationships with existing stakeholders to further identify and satisfy their needs;
- Establishment of a NCIS users group;
- Identify and commence marketing strategies to ensure long term viability;
- Continue to provide training to NCIS users where required, in particular, coroners and their staff;
- Continue to manage the NCIS within budget;
- Develop updates of technical and supporting documentation as required;
- Finalise Licence Agreement with Queensland;
- Develop and implement Service Level Agreements with all relevant jurisdictions for support and maintenance of the Local Case Management System;
- Complete technical development of the single Local Case Management System and release the product to all participating jurisdictions.

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 John McNeil

Members:

Professor Stephen Cordner	Director VIFM, Director MUNCCI
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)
Rebecca Smith	NCIS Project Manager (from 11 September 2001)
Professor Joan Ozanne-Smith	Chair of Injury Prevention, MUARC
Assoc Professor David Ranson	Deputy Director, VIFM

The Board met in August 2001 and March 2002. In particular, the Board considered the *Quality Assurance Plan*, the NCIS Enhancements Policy Statement, the Issues of Concern guidelines, revised caveats for the NCIS website, restructure of the MUNCCI team, on-line status and issues facing the jurisdictions in the data entry process, research issues and services and future funding.

3.2 NCIS Project Team

Since the last report, MUNCCI has undergone a substantial restructure. The Project Manager, Jessica Lightfoot left MUNCCI in April 2001 and was not replaced by Rebecca Smith until mid September 2001. Two Project Officers also left MUNCCI during the last 12 months. The first, Natasha Redman, left MUNCCI in July 2001 and the second Project Officer, Lyndal Owens left MUNCCI in October 2001. A complete re-assessment of the remaining team members was conducted in late 2001. At this time, it was decided that MUNCCI would merge its IT team with that of the Victorian Institute of Forensic Medicine. The rationale for this was that MUNCCI had the services of 1 programmer and a technical officer only, and MUNCCI required the additional support and expertise of a larger IT group. The newly merged IT team of MUNCCI now has the skills of an additional programmer and an IT Manager.

The Quality Assurance Officer, Karen Peasley, who was on secondment from Sydney University pursuant to the 3 year contract with the National Centre for Classification in Health (NCCH) also left MUNCCI in November 2001. Karen's replacement, Sue Wood (who is also on secondment from Sydney University) commenced with MUNCCI in mid December 2001.

Significant consideration was given to the skill base of the remaining team and the way in which the group should be restructured. As a result, 2 new Project Officers were appointed. Kerryn Mulvenna who is on secondment from the Office of Public Prosecutions for 1 year, commenced at the beginning of February 2002 and Jessica Pearse commenced at the end of February 2002. Kerryn Mulvenna is co-ordinating work in relation to the National Police Form and the Drugs Enhancements with the IT team. She is also undertaking research projects as directed. Jessica Pearse is undertaking a complete audit of each jurisdiction's contribution to the database with a view to implementing appropriate strategies to enhance the transfer of data. She is also providing additional training programs to Third Party Users, coroners and their staff.

MUNCCI

The staff composition during 2001/2002 was as follows:

- **Rebecca Smith** Project Manager (since September 2001)
- **Jessica Pearse** Senior Project Officer (since February 2002)
- **Kerryn Mulvenna** Project Officer (since February 2002)
(on 1 year secondment from the
Victorian Office of Public Prosecutions)
- **Marde Hoy** Project/Application Officer (since May 2001)
- **Sue Wood** Quality Assurance Officer (since December 2001)
(on secondment from National Centre for
Classification in Health - Sydney)
- **Jarrold Boxall** Programmer/Data Analyst
(since March 1999);
- **Aldo Morales** Programmer (since September 2001)
- **Jenny Neame** Team Leader, Systems Development
(July 1998 to March 2002);
- **Lyndal Owens** Project Officer
(November 1999 to October 2001);
- **Natasha Redman** Project Officer, Drugs Module
(November 1999 to July 2001);
- **Karen Peasley** Quality Assurance Officer
(November 2000 – November 2001)
(on secondment from National Centre for
Classification in Health - Sydney).

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 2001/2002 and the organisation members represented are set out in Schedule 1.

The NCCCI met in December 2001 to consider the issue of funding for 2002/2003. A sub-committee of the NCCCI was set up to consider future funding and broader access issue for the NCIS. The sub-committee met on 2 occasions in November 2001 and February 2002. It was resolved that MUNCCI make a submission to SCAG in March 2002 to request that the original funding strategy due to expire on 30 June 2002 be extended for a further 12 months. It was further resolved that the issue of the new privacy legislation in a number of jurisdictions be considered.

5. MUNCCI Activities

5.1 Technical Development and Implementation

The efforts of 2001/2002 continued to focus upon maintaining the NCIS Core Data Set, and further developing the MUNCCI Case Management Systems (CMS). The NCIS is currently at Version 2.0 and MUNCCI CMS is currently at Version 3.0, with development on subsequent versions for both the NCIS and CMS currently in progress.

The current status of data transfer for each jurisdiction is indicated in the table below.

Table 1: Status of data transfers from local case management systems

State / Territory	Local System Installed / Commissioned	Encryption protocol used	Transfer frequency
ACT	June 2000	--	Monthly on average (manual)
QLD	September 2001	VPN	Nightly (automatic)
NT	February 2001.	SSH2	Nightly (automatic)
SA	June 1999	--	Monthly on average (manual)
TAS	December 1999	SSH2	Nightly (automatic)
WA	June 2001	--	Monthly on average (manual)*
NSW	Pre-existing	--	Nightly (automatic)
VIC	Pre-existing	--	Nightly (automatic)

*SSH2 encryption protocol is installed for WA, and is awaiting implementation. Once SSH2 is implemented, nightly transfers will result.

Achievements during 2001/2002 within the area of technical development and implementation have included:

- Establishment of a secure SSH2 encryption protocol for data uploads for Tasmania and Northern Territory. This has enabled nightly, secure uploads of data from those particular jurisdictions. The SSH2 protocol has been installed in Western Australia and is soon to be implemented, with ACT and South Australia also soon to be transferred to this encryption protocol. It is expected that all jurisdictions will eventually use SSH2 encryption, and upload data on a nightly basis.
- Installation of a dedicated server in the Northern Territory in May 2002, with remote access permissions provided to MUNCCI IT staff. This has resulted in increased CMS application speed for the Northern Territory Coroners' office, with the remote access capability enabling faster resolution of technical issues and more efficient local system maintenance. Similar server proposals for ACT and South Australia are currently under consideration by the relevant jurisdictions.

- Purchase and installation of a new server for NCIS data storage in Victoria. The transfer of data from the old server to new server was undertaken in May 2002 and has resulted in the following benefits: increased application speed for users when utilising NCIS, a decrease in locking errors, an increased capacity to handle large data uploads from each state, and improved access for users running large queries.
- Combination of the five different local versions of the CMS into one standard version (Version 4.0). This standardisation across jurisdictions will enable more efficient upgrades and maintenance to local systems. Version 4.0 also contains changes to the CMS interface, which will improve user navigation. Amendments to data entry rules will also permit the enforcement of compulsory field completion prior to case closure. It is expected CMS Version 4.0 will be released early in the next financial year.
- Changes to the interface of NCIS Version 2.0. These have included:
 - Development of a new coroners screen which allows coroners to search upon the NCIS using one simple screen – to be piloted and released early in the next financial year.
 - General interface changes improving usability. Includes items such as menu alterations, improved access to attached documents, NSW data entry screen changes, and other changes made resulting from user consultation – Version 2.0 interface changes to be released early in the next financial year..
 - Restriction of the potentially sensitive field “Indigenous Origin” to particular NCIS users.
 - Links on the initial case details screen developed to allow more efficient access to attached case documents.
- Creation of specialised statistical reports for the Northern Territory to enable the production of national benchmarking figures from the local CMS. Production of such reports for other jurisdictions are also being investigated.
- Investigation undertaken into the feasibility of automatic attachment of finding documents generated by the local CMS for Version 4.0.

5.2 National Death Investigation Form

As part of the ongoing development of the NCIS, MUNCCI has considered ways to improve the consistency, comparability and comprehensiveness of coronial information across all jurisdictions. In the previous financial year, MUNCCI took a major step towards this goal, by developing a proposal to implement a standard police form for investigation of death. In the last 12 months, MUNCCI has been liaising with Police Commissioners to move towards implementation of this proposal.

Police death investigation documents, in particular the Report of Death to the Coroner, provide a valuable source of data to inform death investigations and death and injury prevention efforts. Currently coronial staff manually sift through the report of death and other documents in the police brief of

evidence (if available) to enter relevant information into the NCIS. The proposed national death investigation form captures the information in a readily accessible format, facilitating much more efficient and easy storage of this important information.

In developing the proposed form MUNCCI consulted 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 to be collected from the national death investigation form includes information related to deaths which have involved drugs/alcohol/poisons; drowning/water; weapons/ firearms; fire/burns; products; suspected suicide; transport; work and unexpected infant/child death.

During the last year, MUNCCI has forwarded a copy of the proposed national death investigation form to the relevant police contact in each jurisdiction and where appropriate, to a number of Police Commissioners. MUNCCI has obtained Police Commissioner endorsement of the proposal to implement the form in some Australian jurisdictions. Of the remaining states and territories, most have progressed as far as either working towards developing and implementing the form, or are awaiting the outcome of a pilot of the proposed form.

The pilot is to occur in Victoria. Victoria police have costed the proposal and have created an electronic version of the form, which will be made available on the Victorian Police Intranet site. An e-mail address has been created which will enable police officers completing the form to securely and directly electronically transfer the completed form to the State Coroners Office. Victoria Police and MUNCCI will pilot the form at a metropolitan and regional police station. Frankston and Bendigo police stations have been selected for these purposes.

It is anticipated that the pilot will commence in October 2002 for a period of 3 months and that the results will be available early in the new year.

5.3 Drugs Enhancements Project

As noted in the last annual report, the implementation of the Drugs Enhancements (such as the addition of new data items) was amalgamated with other proposed enhancements. That is, the requirements were to be implemented, along with enhancements needed as a result of the proposed introduction of the national death investigation form. Given that the pilot of the form is not anticipated to commence until October 2002, the enhancements were not able to be completed in this financial year. It is anticipated that the enhancements will be completed in the next year.

In the past year, MUNCCI has continued working on the proposal to enhance toxicology information available on the NCIS. MUNCCI met with the Toxicology Managers of each state and territory (except WA) in Canberra in May 2002. It was resolved at this meeting that standardisation of testing across Australia would be a good long term goal, but is not viable for the moment due to the funding required. MUNCCI and the Toxicology Managers therefore decided to focus on obtaining the transfer of existing toxicological data held in the current toxicology systems to NCIS. The resources required for such transfer vary according to each state, depending on the type of

information system used in each toxicology laboratory. MUNCCI conducted an analysis of the resources required by each toxicology laboratory and prepared a submission to the Inter-Governmental Committee on Drugs (IGCD), seeking funding for the enhancements. This submission was presented at the IGCD meeting at the end of May 2002. The formal resolution of the meeting was an agreement to refer the submission to the Monitoring and Evaluation Coordination Committee (MECC) and members of the IGCD were strongly urged to consider the financial aspects of the paper in their own jurisdiction. MUNCCI will be monitoring this matter.

At the 2nd Drugs Enhancements Workshop in July 2000, the managers of pathology divisions in each state and territory agreed in principle to provide a list of all contributing drugs (in the pathologist's opinion) either in the cause of death statement or another easily identifiable part of the autopsy report. Although some pathologists have implemented this agreement, MUNCCI hopes this practice will be adopted uniformly across each jurisdiction.

Finally, it is proposed that a glossary of terms used by pathologists in describing the cause of death in drug related cases will be made available to authorised NCIS users. It is anticipated that the glossary of terms will be made available to NCIS users early in the next financial year.

5.4 Water-Related Deaths Data

In April 2000, MUNCCI was funded by the Injury Prevention Section of the Commonwealth Department of Health and Ageing 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.

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

- Promotion of a national minimum data set 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

Since the recommendations of the Reference Group were made, MUNCCI has expanded the scope of the project. MUNCCI has not only focused on the promotion of a national minimum data set regarding water-related fatalities, but is working towards capturing data regarding other forms of death. It is anticipated that the implementation of the proposed national death investigation form will enable this goal to be achieved.

As a result of the proposal to implement the national death investigation form, enhancements to the NCIS are necessarily required. Accordingly, MUNCCI and the IT Department have commenced working towards adopting the second recommendation of the Water-Related Death Reference Group. Enhancements to the NCIS will not be completed however, until the results of

the pilot of the form are known. Likewise, the third recommendation of the Reference Group will not be adopted until the form is implemented and the enhancements to the NCIS are finalised.

5.5 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. It was noted in last year's report that once the NCIS had complete and quality data from all jurisdictions, it was envisaged that MUNCCI would report trends and patterns in issues of *MUNCCI Talk*.

Since that time, the staff of MUNCCI have worked towards implementing the tasks identified in the *Quality Assurance Plan* in an effort to improve the quality and completeness of the data. A number of significant milestones have been met and the quality of the data has improved enormously. As a result of the improved quality and completeness of the data, MUNCCI has begun to undertake some research projects.

An example of research produced by MUNCCI is a lengthy report released in March 2002 regarding suicide by plastic bag asphyxiation during the period between July 2000 and February 2002. This report was prepared for the purposes of a demonstration to the Department of Health and Ageing. The study revealed that there were at least 36 deaths in Australia from suicide by plastic bag asphyxia in the period examined. Following production of the report, the Department of Health and Ageing obtained permission from MUNCCI to present the report to the National Advisory Council on Suicide Prevention, to promote an informed discussion of suicide by asphyxiation.

A variety of other studies have been conducted, and have included the following:

- Single vehicle collisions off a highway into fixed objects (roadside furniture deaths) - National study for State Coroner's Assistants' unit, Victoria); deaths in Manningham Shire (for Doncaster police station);
- Homicides where victim has suffered 50 or more stab wound - For Behavioural Analysis Unit of the State Management Division of Victoria police;
- Deaths involving special agricultural vehicles - For Dr Yossi Berger of the National of the National Occupational Health and Safety Unit, The Australian Workers Union;
- Deaths involving post hole diggers (Augers) - Issue of Concern reported to the State Coroner, Victoria. Pattern of death discovered whilst producing report of deaths involving special agricultural vehicles.

In the next twelve months, MUNCCI aims to increase the amount of research projects conducted. It is anticipated that MUNCCI will report patterns and trends observed, in *MUNCCI Talk*. In addition, MUNCCI has commenced working on a new publication called *Fatal Facts*, which will be exclusively distributed to Coroners and Registrars in Australia and will be released early in the next financial year. It is proposed that each addition will include a section documenting significant research projects undertaken by the MUNCCI team.

As MUNCCI is now focussing more attention on the production of quantitative research, in the next year, a Research Policy will be developed and presented to the MUNCCI Board for ratification.

5.6 Quality Assurance

The quality of data has become a priority for MUNCCI as the NCIS database approaches its second anniversary of data entry. Initiatives over the past 12 months have included the recent implementation of a comprehensive QA process, based on the NCIS QA Plan, that focuses on the auditing of MUNCCI designed local systems with corrected and completed data fields uploaded to NCIS. For those states that do not use a MUNCCI designed system, QA review will occur on NCIS data alone. This QA process will take up considerable time in 2002 as the backlog of NCIS data undergoes review and the data quality, including completeness, validity and reliability, is improved. A regular quality review system will then be implemented to establish and maintain a high level of confidence in the integrity of the database with its users. MUNCCI has also been pro-active in attempting to assist jurisdictions with their data entry and document attachment backlog.

MUNCCI has fostered a reciprocal arrangement with the Australian Bureau of Statistics (ABS) Cause of Death Unit who is currently utilising NCIS data to aid the coding of their records. In return, ABS will code cause of death, location and activity for NCIS using the ICD-10 clinical classification and it is expected that this process will begin later in 2002 following consolidation of their 2001 coding year. In a similar arrangement, the National Occupational Health and Safety Commission (NOHSC) has commenced coding occupation at time of death and industry at time of death for work related deaths on the NCIS. The Australian and New Zealand Standard Industrial Classification will be used to code industry at time of death; and the Australian Standard Classification of Occupations will be used to code occupation at time of death.

Two addenda to the *Data Dictionary for the National Coroners Information System* have been released in an effort to improve the quality of data captured on the NCIS. The variable 'bystander to a work related incident' has been amended to 'work-relatedness' in order to capture information about all work-related incidents. Also the 'other or unspecified' location codes have been divided to allow greater specificity in location coding. A new version of the data dictionary will be released in late 2002 as a result of updated versions of some of the classifications upon which some NCIS modules are based and due to planned NCIS enhancements.

The *National Coroners Information System Coding Manual, version 1* was distributed to coronial jurisdictions in January 2002. This manual provides practical instructions, examples and guidelines for data entry of coronial information onto local case management systems and NCIS. To complement the coding manual, data entry staff in coronial jurisdictions also receive a monthly newsletter to alert them to any misinterpretation of coding conventions and advise on coding issues where QA review has identified inconsistency in data entry.

5.7 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 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 are set out in the Schedule to the Licence Agreement with each jurisdiction. The Access Rules allow access to the NCIS by the following two categories of users:

▪ **Category 1 – Coronial Users**

This category includes coroners and clerks; coronial police; coroners' researchers; forensic, medical, and scientific staff. 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. There are currently over 150 users within this category with training in NCIS use a major task for 2002/2003.

▪ **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. As at 30 June 2002, there are 65 authorised Third Party organisations with 115 individual users. These organisations are undertaking a wide variety of research projects using NCIS data.

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 MUNCCI will then issue nominated staff members with a username and password after a Confidentiality Undertaking has been signed by all nominated users and returned to MUNCCI.

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

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 and 2001/2002 for the continued development of the NCIS in accordance with the table below.

Funding for the 2002/2003 financial year will be by way of a continuation of the original funding strategy. After June 30 2003, the funding of the NCIS will be subject to implementation of the new funding strategy.

Table 2: 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

The following table shows the contributions for 2002/2003 pursuant to the 1 year extension of the original funding strategy.

Table 3: Funding of NCIS for 2002/2003

Jurisdiction	<u>2002/2003</u>
Commonwealth	275,000
New South Wales	93,000
Victoria	67,900
Queensland	50,900
South Australia	22,700
Western Australia	26,700
Tasmania	7,000
ACT	4,193
NT	2,443
Total	\$549,836

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 2000/01	185,883
Commonwealth, State and Territory contributions	479,000
Total core income	664,883
Expenditure	
Salary costs	356,915
Operating costs (phone, fax, consumables)	10,441
Hardware	47,162
Software support	12,038
Staff Training/Education	3,804
Consultancies	69,000
Travel	17,602
NCCCI / catering	0
VIFM network services (Internet access, IT support)	39,000
Depreciation	7,342
Total core expenditure	563,304
BALANCE	101, 579

7.2 Drugs Module project

Income	\$
Brought forward 2000/01	158,746
Contributions	39,300
Total income	198, 046
Expenditure	
Salary costs	25,899
Travel	1,200
Operational support (IT consultation, PC support) – fixed cost	23,950
Administration costs (office supplies, phone etc) – fixed cost	1000
Total expenditure	52,049
BALANCE	145,997

7.3 Water-related Deaths Data Needs Feasibility Study

Income	\$
Payment	15,000
Total income	15,000
Expenditure	
Salary costs	14,000
Operating Costs	1,000
Total expenditure	15,000
BALANCE	0

7.4 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 the NCIS data set; and
- Advice regarding data items for inclusion in MUNCCI's proposed national death investigation form for police investigations of coronial deaths.

National Injury Surveillance Unit (NISU)

- Ongoing assistance with refining the NCIS data set; and
- Advice regarding data items for inclusion in MUNCCI's proposed national death investigation form for police investigations of coronial deaths.

National Occupational Health and Safety Commission (NOHSC)

- Ongoing assistance with refining the NCIS data set; and
- Ongoing support regarding the coding of NCIS data including occupation and industry at the time of death for work related deaths on the NCIS

Australian Bureau of Statistics (ABS)

- Ongoing support regarding the provision of coding and 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 Assistant Director, Civil Law Branch Legal policy and Court Section Victorian Department of Justice
Standing Committee of Attorneys-General (SCAG) – Commonwealth	Dr Dianne Heriot Assistant Secretary Crime Prevention Branch Criminal Justice Division Attorney-General's Department
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 Ageing
Police – States/Territories	Superintendent Ross Dwyer
Police – Commonwealth	As for SCAG
Occupational Health and Safety Administrators' Group – States/Territories	Michael Little Director, Strategy Health and Safety Business Unit WorkCover, Victoria
Occupational Health and Safety Administrators' Group – Commonwealth	John Rowling Assistant Secretary Safety and Compensation Policy Branch Dept Employment Workplace Relations and Small Business
Work Place Safety - National	Dr Robert Brazenor Epidemiology Team Leader Data Policy & Analysis, NOHSC
Consumer Affairs – State/Territory	Ms Lois Goodes Manager, Policy Consumer and Business Affairs Victoria

ORGANISATION	REPRESENTATIVE
Consumer Affairs - Commonwealth	John Wunsch 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 Team Leader, National Statistical Coordination and Analysis Australian Transport Safety Bureau
Australian Bureau of Statistics	Ron Casey 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