

**NCIS**

# **STRATEGIC PLAN**

**for the**

**NATIONAL CORONERS  
INFORMATION SYSTEM**

**2007-2012**



**National  
Coroners  
Information  
System**

A blurred, blue-tinted photograph of an office workstation. A person is seated at a desk with a computer monitor and keyboard. The background shows office shelves and equipment.

## MESSAGE FROM THE DIRECTOR

The NCIS is arguably the most developed and complete collection of national coronial information in any country to date. As at January 2007 there were over 120,000 fatalities recorded on the system. With around twenty thousand deaths reported to a coroner nationally each year, there will be close to 250,000 cases on the database by the end of 2012. The existence of a clear, concise, and useful strategic plan for the NCIS over this period is therefore crucial to ensure that the system continues to meet the needs of its various users, stakeholders and the community in general, whilst focusing resources on areas that will continue to result in a high quality information service for coroners, policy makers and researchers.

Accordingly, the NCIS Strategic Plan 2007-2012 has been developed, with input from a range of stakeholders including State Coroners/Chief Magistrates; the NCIS Board of Management; the Victorian Institute of Forensic Medicine (VIFM); coronial staff; and NCIS users. A number of forums were held with these groups during 2006 to ensure that all views were captured when determining what should be included in the strategic plan. An NCIS stakeholder workshop was held on 1 September 2006 in Sydney, in which over 80 mortality data users came together to discuss a shared vision for the NCIS. Researchers, government policy makers, data collectors, police and coroners were all represented. Delegates from health, justice, transport, workplace safety, mental health, and child safety agencies also attended and provided valuable contributions. Two strong themes emerged from these discussions. Coronial data on the system needed to be of optimal quality and quantity; and the data should be easily available and accessible to various users. As a repository of information, the NCIS is only able to make an impact on the prevention of death and injury in the Australian community if the right information is made accessible to the right people in the right manner.

While the objectives of this plan are ambitious, we believe they represent the areas that must be pursued if the NCIS is to maximize its potential to help reduce further preventable deaths and serious injuries.

It should be noted that the goals and objectives in this plan will not be able to be achieved in isolation. In some instances, additional funding will be needed, and in almost all instances support and commitment will be required from coroners and their staff, other death investigation practitioners, and government and research agencies. While the NCIS is a resource which can help inform, facilitate and support death prevention activities, it is not its role to determine state or territory coronial processes or operations. However within the next 5 years, we hope to collaborate with our key users and data providers to enhance the efficiency and effectiveness of the NCIS, thus improving accessibility to useful, timely coronial information.

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'D Ranson', with a large, stylized 'D' and 'R'.

A/PROF DAVID RANSON  
DIRECTOR NCIS

## NCIS VISION

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

## NCIS VALUES

The NCIS adopts the same values as those of the Victorian Institute of Forensic Medicine (the body responsible for managing the NCIS) within the context of the work we do in managing the national coronial database.

### RESPECT

**We respect all people,** our history, our calling and the law

*We respect the deceased and their families, and the sensitivity of their information which is contained within the NCIS. We respect the beliefs of other cultures in relation to their deceased, and the legislative environment in which we operate.*

### OPENNESS

**We are open-minded.** Open to each other and open to knowledge and learning

*We operate in an open and transparent manner towards our funders, stakeholders, governing bodies and system users. We are interested in the opinions and learnings of others with respect to managing data systems, and accordingly share our knowledge and experience with others.*

### SERVICE

**We provide services** for the community, which are dedicated, responsive and client focused.

*We provide accurate mortality data to our clients to assist the community with the prevention of death and injury. We listen to feedback from our clients about ways to improve our service.*

### INTEGRITY

**We will be beyond reproach.** We commit to truth, confidentiality, impartiality, and accountability. We commit to systems, which are secure reliable, accurate, valid and safe.

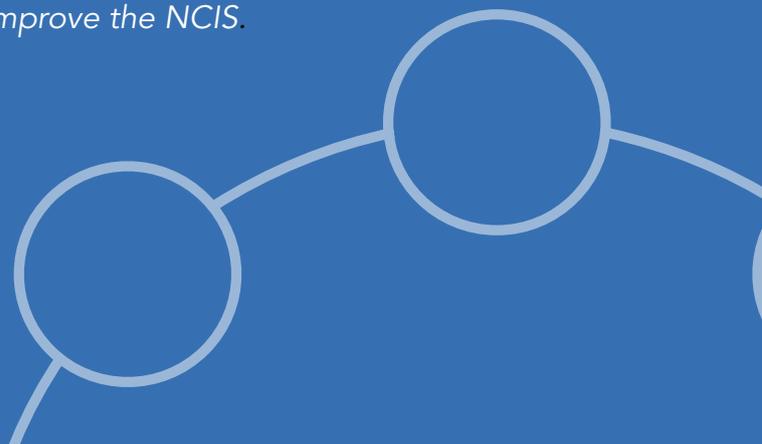
*We ensure our system is secure, protected and accurate. We ensure any data we are privy to is kept confidential and protected from inappropriate access.*

### INNOVATION

**We are creative and curious.** We are not afraid to do things differently.

We will continue our search for knowledge and truth.

*We are willing to consider new and better ways to improve the NCIS.*



# NCIS STAKEHOLDERS

There is a wide variety of stakeholders involved in the NCIS, who often have different needs and wants from the system. In some cases the one stakeholder may be involved with the NCIS in a variety of roles (eg. as a data provider and funding agency, or a funding agency and a data user). The sheer number of stakeholders means a concerted effort needs to be made to ensure a balance between all groups is reached and that they all obtain the maximum benefit from their involvement with the NCIS. Below is an outline of some of the major stakeholder groups and the nature of the relationship with each group as it relates to the Strategic Plan.

## DATA PROVIDERS

- Coronial Offices
- Australian Bureau of Statistics (ABS)
- Australian Safety and Compensation Council (ASCC)

### *Nature of relationship:*

The majority of information contained on the NCIS is entered by coronial offices around Australia. The timeliness and accuracy of data on the NCIS is therefore largely dependent on the efforts and resources assigned to NCIS activities by coronial managers/registrars. These managers need to see the benefits of their continued, timely data entry to the NCIS. This may be accomplished across several areas, such as a reducing the number of researchers who request physical access to coronial files, or local case management systems assisting with operational processes or reporting requirements.

Additional codes are used primarily by researchers to supplement coronial coding (eg. International Classification of Diseases-10, Australian Standard Geographical Classification). To ensure they continue to provide the NCIS with additional specific codes for the benefit of other users, the external agencies that provide these codes need to view the NCIS as a useful and easily accessible source of information for their own data purposes.

## DATA USERS

- Death Investigation Users
  - State Coroners/Chief Magistrates, other Coroners/Magistrates
  - Forensic pathologists, toxicologists, police assisting the coroner
- Third Party Users
  - State and Federal government departments/agencies in the areas of health, transport, work safety, mental health, child safety, consumer safety, emergency services, police etc
  - National mortality data agencies such as ABS, ASCC, Australian Transport Safety Bureau
  - Research agencies such as the Royal Life Saving Society of Australia, NSW Injury Risk Management Research Centre, National Drug and Alcohol Research Centre, National Injury Surveillance Unit, and Monash University Accident Research Centre.
  - Mortality Review Committees such as Child Death Review Teams, Adverse Drug Reactions Unit (TGA), consultative committees on maternal, surgical and anaesthetic deaths.

### *Nature of relationship:*

Ensuring that the two groups of data users (death investigators and third party users) are able to access information in the most effective manner possible is critical for the success of the NCIS. Various strategies to deliver information to coroners in a more proactive and consistent manner have been included in this plan, as have several objectives to improve the flexibility and level of access available to third party users. The addition of fielded information about drug fatalities and

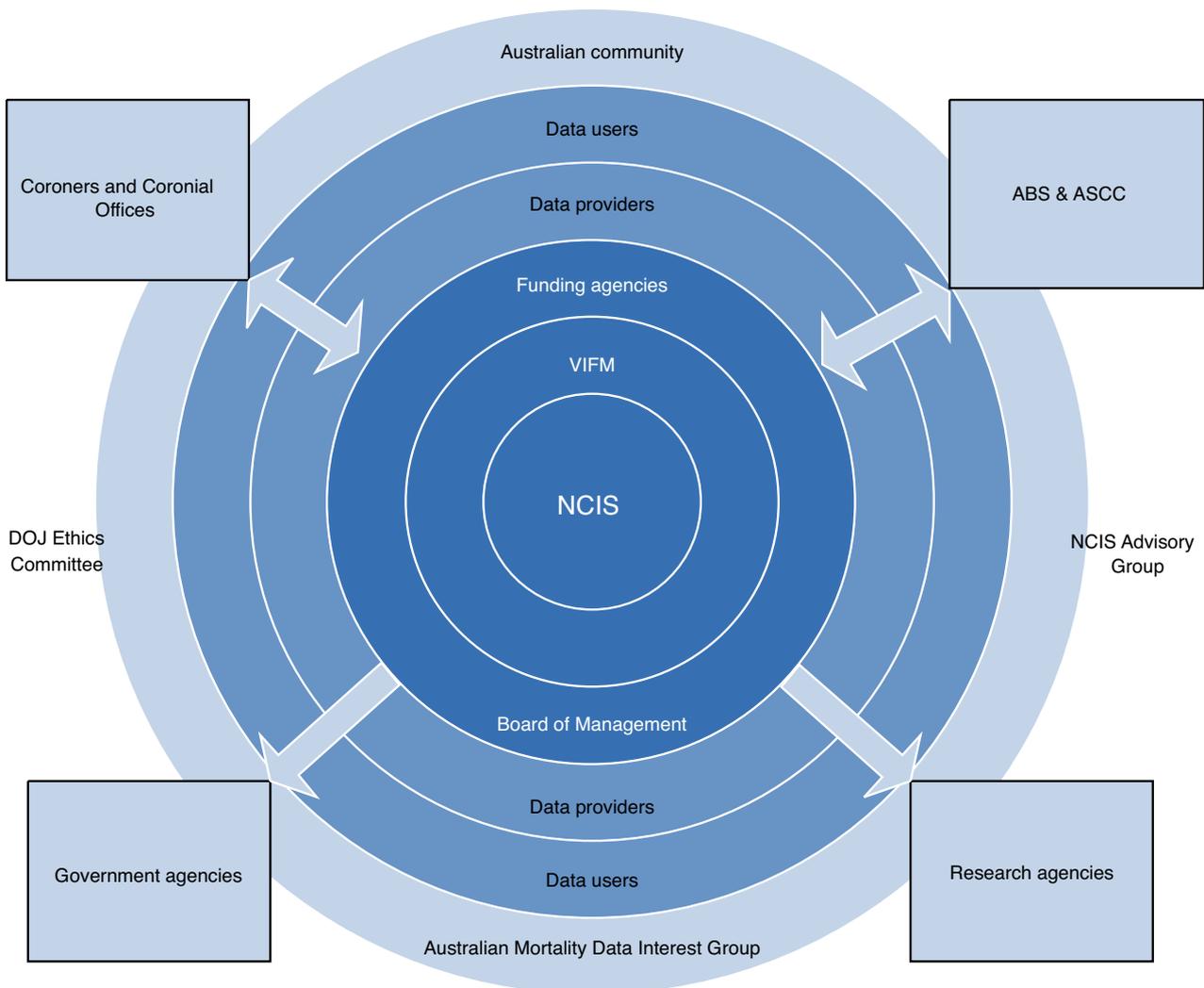
from the police report of death forms should also enhance data users' experience with the system. More accessible aggregate data in the form of reports and publications should also increase the availability of data. The quality and quantity of information available on the system is one of the vital areas when ensuring the usefulness of the NCIS, so a major goal relates to a focus on these areas.

### OPERATIONAL STAKEHOLDERS

- Funding agencies (represented through the Board of Management)
- Victorian Institute of Forensic Medicine (VIFM)

Providing the core operational funds for the system, the NCIS funding agencies must see a beneficial contribution being made by the NCIS in a number of forums. These include the coronial process; the Justice and Health departments; other state and federal government agencies, and death and injury prevention within the Australian community in general. Strategies such as improved communication about research and safety campaigns which have used NCIS data, increased usage of the system by government, and close liaison with the Board about current issues of interest should all assist in achieving a sense of system value.

The VIFM Council must also continue to see the NCIS as an appropriate entity to manage on behalf of the Board. This may be achieved through the VIFM being able to demonstrate the value of the NCIS for health promotion and death prevention purposes, and assisting researchers from both academic and policy development sectors in this endeavor.



# OVERVIEW OF STRATEGIC GOALS AND OBJECTIVES

**GOAL: ASSIST CORONERS WITH THEIR DEATH INVESTIGATION AND PREVENTION ROLES BY PROVIDING TIMELY, ACCURATE AND COMPLETE INFORMATION ABOUT PREVIOUSLY REPORTED FATALITIES (page 6)**

## Objectives

1. To make national coronial information easily and routinely available for every coroner around Australia
2. To provide system support for the efficient management of coroners' case management systems

**GOAL: IMPROVE THE ACCESSIBILITY AND USEFULNESS OF CORONIAL DATA FOR THE PURPOSES OF RESEARCH AND POLICY DEVELOPMENT (page 8)**

## Objectives

3. To increase the accessibility of information on the NCIS
4. Engage in increased consultation with data users about their needs and possible system linkages

**GOAL: IMPROVE DATABASE INTEGRITY (page 11)**

## Objectives

5. Improve the timeliness of data entry and case closure on the NCIS
6. Improve the quality and comprehensiveness of data on the NCIS
7. Encourage and support the enhancement and addition of certain reports available on the NCIS

**GOAL: IMPROVE AWARENESS AND THE FUTURE SECURITY OF THE NCIS AS A VALUABLE DEATH AND INJURY RESEARCH TOOL (page 13)**

## Objectives

8. Actively utilise the experience and networks of the NCIS Board and Committee to further strengthen and promote the NCIS
9. Increase publications and promotion of NCIS data
10. Ensure continuation of high level support for the NCIS

## **GOAL: ASSIST CORONERS WITH THEIR DEATH INVESTIGATION AND PREVENTION ROLES BY PROVIDING TIMELY, ACCURATE AND COMPLETE INFORMATION ABOUT PREVIOUSLY REPORTED FATALITIES**

### **OUR CHALLENGE**

Despite coroners having access to the web interface which permits searching of the NCIS, many coroners do not have the time or technical expertise to conduct searches themselves. It has been recognised that a more proactive and consistent method needs to be developed to ensure information from the NCIS is routinely and easily accessible to coroners and their staff. This will in turn assist them in managing investigations, producing findings and recommendations and contributing to death and injury prevention activities within an evidentiary framework.

### **OUTCOME**

Upon the achievement of this goal, national coronial information would be provided effectively and efficiently to each Australian coroner to support them in the making of evidentiary based decisions about investigations; in the making of relevant and effective findings and recommendations; and to assist State Coroners/Chief Magistrates to inform policy development. Coronial offices will be able to utilise local case management systems to more easily and effectively report on the operational performance of the courts.

### **OBJECTIVES**

1. To make national coronial information easily and routinely available for every coroner around Australia
2. To provide system support for the efficient management of coroners' case management systems

### **STRATEGIES**

**Objective 1: Make information from the NCIS easily and routinely available for every coroner around Australia**

- Creation of an online coronial resource containing information to assist coroners with their investigative practices (such as practice notes, key cases with recommendations, expert lists, trend alert warnings, maps of fatal "hotspots")
- Incorporate an NCIS search into standard investigation protocols upon a death being reported to a coroner's office
- Production of information concerning mortality trends and patterns

**Objective 2: Provide system support for the efficient use of coroners' case management systems**

- Enhance the ability of operational statistics to be generated from the local case management systems
- Enhance functionality of local case management systems to support operational processes within each of the coronial offices

## HOW WILL WE KNOW WE'VE SUCCEEDED?

### Short Term (1-2 years)

- Clear understanding of what coroners want/need from an online resource
- Data analysts appointed in two jurisdictions to conduct NCIS searches for coroners on each reportable death (where appropriate)
- Annual mortality publication on coronial data produced
- Regular statistics provided to coronial managers about operational performance and numbers of fatalities in their jurisdiction
- Clear understanding of extra functionality requested for local case management systems to assist operational processes

### Medium Term (2-4 years)

- Coronial online resource pilot conducted
- Coronial data analyst in every jurisdiction to perform routine NCIS searches for each notified death (where appropriate)
- Automated trend analysis software piloted
- Local case management systems have added functionality to allow the production of reports and statistics by coronial managers
- Extra functionality incorporated into local case management systems to assist operational processes (i.e. contact lists for distribution of findings)

### Long Term (4-5 years)

- Online coronial resource accessible by every coroner in Australia
- Known feasibility of automated NCIS searches linked into local case management systems, triggered upon case notification
- Automated trend analysis results fed into online coronial resource
- NCIS has become a routine part of standard death investigation processes

## REQUIRED FROM KEY STAKEHOLDERS TO ACHIEVE THIS GOAL:

### Human factors

- willingness of coronial offices to modify their investigative practices to incorporate NCIS searches into standard procedures
- cultural change of coroners to make the most effective use of the information available to them via the NCIS
- communication from coronial managers about their operational needs from the case management systems

### Economic factors

- additional funding or reorganization of existing roles to enable NCIS data analyst(s) to be appointed in each coroners office
- additional funding to make software enhancements to local case management systems as required

## **GOAL: IMPROVE THE ACCESSIBILITY AND USEFULNESS OF CORONIAL DATA FOR THE PURPOSES OF RESEARCH AND POLICY DEVELOPMENT**

### **OUR CHALLENGE**

The needs of researchers and policy makers are not always the same as coroners or other death investigators. There are a variety of interest groups that wish to obtain information from the NCIS about different types of fatalities in different ways. In some cases, these groups consider that accessibility to NCIS data is hindered by existing protocols, data access methods and a lack of national standardization concerning coronial practices. The coroners (via agreements with the state/territory governments) currently direct the level of access that can be provided to researchers and policy makers, and approve statistics compiled from NCIS data that relate to their jurisdiction.

This goal therefore relates to providing coronial data that is easily accessible and useful to researchers, policy makers and the wider community for injury and death prevention purposes, without compromising the standards and practices of the coronial courts or the relevant legislative environment surrounding personal, sensitive and health information. This will be achieved through liaising more closely with mortality data users and stakeholders to determine their unique needs, making adjustments to the manner in which users can access coronial data from the system where possible, and encouraging greater consistency of some current coronial information. Future advantageous data linkages between the NCIS and other mortality/morbidity systems will also be explored.

### **OUTCOME**

Upon the achievement of this goal, appropriate key organizations will have increased access to, and awareness about, cases recently notified to the coroner. Certain coronial practices will be standardised across Australia to enhance the accuracy and efficiency of coronial data interpretation; and the NCIS interface will support intuitive and detailed identification of cases of interest. Strong relationships will have been developed with key national and international mortality data users, with the potential for future linkages with other data collections developed and supported.

Aggregate data from the NCIS will be more easily available to users and the wider community, via the form of information fact sheets, data cubes and increased public reports.

### **OBJECTIVES**

3. To increase the accessibility to information on the NCIS
4. Engage in increased consultation with key mortality data users about their needs and possible system linkages

### **STRATEGIES FOR EACH OBJECTIVE**

Objective 3: Increase the accessibility of information on the NCIS

- Support the process of early notification of deaths to approved organizations
- Enhance the ability of the system to identify and extract required data
- Produce aggregate statistics, reports and maps showing pattern/trends in coronial data nationally and across various regions
- Support and encourage the national standardization of certain coronial practices

#### **Objective 4: Engage in increased consultation with key mortality data users about their needs and possible system linkages**

- Hold regular meetings with mortality data users to determine researchers'/policy makers' needs (e.g. NCIS Advisory Group; Australian Mortality Data Interest Group; key research/government data users)
- Identify and develop relationships with national and international bodies which manage mortality or morbidity datasets that could link/exchange information with NCIS.

#### **HOW WILL WE KNOW WE'VE SUCCEEDED?**

##### **Short Term (1-2 years)**

- Clear understanding of the parameters surrounding increased access to open case information
- Feasibility of automated upload from the national police form for notification of death determined
- Aggregate statistics available on the NCIS website
- Location information geocoded and available for searching by geographic regions and mapping
- Regular meetings established with key mortality data user groups
- Datasets of potential linkage value identified

##### **Medium Term (2-4 years)**

- Automated case notification available to authorised users at an appropriate point in the investigative process e.g. all work related deaths notified to OHS agencies
- Drugs module nationally implemented
- Maps of fatality locations available on the NCIS website
- NCIS web search interface redesigned and improved
- NCIS authorised to release de-identified statistics without requiring coronial approval
- Agreement from coroners to harmonise certain standard practices and documentation
- Clear understanding of feasibility of linkages to other datasets
- Increased positive responses from NCIS third party user survey

##### **Long Term (4-5 years)**

- Implementation of automated uploads from police report of death forms
- Detailed reports on topics of interest produced and made available by the NCIS
- Improved national consistency of certain coronial practices and documentation
- Implementation of linkages to other data sets (where feasible and beneficial)

## REQUIRED FROM KEY STAKEHOLDERS TO ACHIEVE THIS GOAL:

### Human factors

- willingness of coroners to harmonise some of their coronial practices
- willingness of coroners/government to allow certain organizations increased access to open case information
- willingness of coroners to streamline process for aggregate statistics release
- communication by user groups about their data access needs

### Economic factors

- additional funding to automatically upload extra data from the police report of death forms and Drugs Module

## **GOAL: IMPROVE DATABASE INTEGRITY**

### **OUR CHALLENGE**

Data entry timeliness, quality and comprehensiveness have been steadily improving over the past few years, however constraints around data entry resources and organizational structures at coronial offices have thus far limited the impact/improvements NCIS has been able to achieve in these areas. A more proactive approach to address this issue is therefore required.

This goal relates to the allocation of additional resources to ensure that data entry processes are timely, accurate and consistent across Australia, and that the level of information available is maximized.

### **OUTCOME**

Upon the achievement of this goal, the NCIS database will be regarded as a reliable source of national coronial information. Completed coronial cases will be accurately coded and available on the NCIS within a reasonable timeframe, there will be real-time coding of information for cases still under investigation, and there will be a full suite of text reports available for almost all cases on the NCIS.

### **OBJECTIVES**

5. Improve the timeliness of data entry and case closure on the NCIS
6. Improve the quality and comprehensiveness of data on the NCIS
7. Encourage and support the enhancement and addition of certain reports available on the NCIS

### **STRATEGIES FOR EACH OBJECTIVE**

#### **Objective 5: Improve the timeliness of data entry and case closure on the NCIS**

- Appoint qualified, dedicated coders to perform NCIS data entry in each coroners office around Australia.
- Facilitate real time coding of coronial cases as the investigation progresses.

#### **Objective 6: Improve the quality and comprehensiveness of data on the NCIS**

- Appoint qualified, dedicated coders to perform NCIS data entry in each coroners office around Australia.
- Implement an annual training and accreditation program for NCIS coders to achieve a national coding competency standard.
- Obtain full text documents in a more efficient/effective manner for certain jurisdictions, and for fatalities that occur in country areas.

#### **Objective 7: Encourage and support the enhancement and addition of certain reports available on the NCIS**

- Support and encourage the improvement of consistency and detail within various coronial documents which are made available via the NCIS (e.g. Coronial findings relating to unidentified remains; narratives of police reports provided to a coroner)
- Consider the feasibility and benefit of proposals to add additional documentation to the NCIS

## HOW WILL WE KNOW WE'VE SUCCEEDED?

### Short Term (1-2 years)

- Business case prepared and resources costed for appointment of qualified, dedicated coders in each coronial office
- Coder training program designed and endorsed
- Clear identification of any extra reports/documentation which would benefit the majority of users if added to the NCIS

### Medium Term (2-4 years)

- Qualified, dedicated coders trained and employed in each coronial office.
- Coding accuracy and data timeliness meeting set targets
- Real-time coding occurring in coronial offices (for case and intent type on notification; document attachment; mechanism and object and causes of death)
- Annual national workshops held to deliver new coder training material and assess competency
- Agreement from coroners/forensic practitioners to harmonize certain standard practices and documentation
- Business plan prepared for any extra reports/documentation acknowledged as being widely beneficial

### Long Term (4-5 years)

- Coder training program able to be delivered remotely online
- Improved national consistency of certain coronial/forensic practices and documentation
- Approved extra reports/documentation available on the NCIS

## REQUIRED FROM KEY STAKEHOLDERS TO ACHIEVE THIS GOAL:

### Human factors

- willingness of coronial offices to modify their data entry practices to allow real time data entry
- willingness of police, coronial and forensic agencies to review the quality and consistency of their produced documentation

### Economic factors

- funding to resource qualified, dedicated data entry personnel in each of the coronial offices
- funding to resource an annual training and accreditation program for coders
- funding for the addition of any extra documentation

## **GOAL: IMPROVE AWARENESS AND THE FUTURE SECURITY OF THE NCIS AS A VALUABLE DEATH AND INJURY RESEARCH TOOL**

### **OUR CHALLENGE**

The original intent of the NCIS was to maintain and facilitate access to national coronial information. As this was a significant and complex undertaking, little focus up to this point has been given to active promotion or marketing of the database. It has been recognised that the NCIS needs to take a more proactive role in increasing awareness about the system to develop a higher profile, and in the production of basic aggregate data, to ensure the value of information contained within the database is utilised.

### **OUTCOME**

Upon the achievement of this goal, the NCIS will be acknowledged by researchers, coroners and policy makers as one of the key collections of mortality data in Australia, and recognised internationally as a leader in the development of national coronial data collections. The NCIS will have an improved profile in the media and community as being a resource for the provision of information about preventable deaths, and its future (and funding) will be more secure.

### **OBJECTIVES**

8. Actively utilise the experience and networks of the NCIS Board and Committee to further strengthen and promote the NCIS
9. Increase publications and promotion of NCIS data uses
10. Ensure continuation of high level support for the NCIS

### **STRATEGIES FOR EACH OBJECTIVE**

**Objective 8: Actively utilise the experience and networks of the NCIS Board and Committee to further strengthen and promote the NCIS**

- Obtain feedback from Board of Management about current issues within the Justice/Health portfolios; and what government departments want from mortality data
- Regularly provide information to State Coroners/Chief Magistrates about the uses and benefits of the NCIS to enable them to assist in marketing/promoting the system to Ministers and government
- Ensure the NCIS is considered an important part of the development and delivery of the VIFM Strategic and Operational Plans

**Objective 9: Increase publications and promotion of NCIS data uses**

- More stringently enforce requirement to acknowledge NCIS as a data source in publications, with users to inform NCIS of any initiatives/impacts that have resulted from data use. Copies (or abstracts) of publications required to be submitted for inclusion on NCIS website
- Publish external reports and prevention/safety initiatives based on NCIS data in a prominent position on the NCIS website
- Produce and publish reports/information on current issues of interest to the community
- Maintain a presence at national and international mortality conferences and forums

**Objective 10: Ensure continuation of high level support for the NCIS**

- Actively engage with any newly appointed State Coroners/Chief Magistrates to educate and inform them of the uses and benefits of the NCIS

- Demonstrate to State Coroners/Chief Magistrates how the NCIS can be used to help increase the profile of the coroners courts within the community and Ministerial Offices
- Actively target state and federal government departments who should be using NCIS data
- Encourage reference to the NCIS in coronial legislation
- Identify and maintain funding for core system operations and the achievement of strategic plan goals

## HOW WILL WE KNOW WE'VE SUCCEEDED?

### Short Term (1-2 years)

- Improved delivery of mortality data about relevant issues of community interest
- Newly appointed State Coroners/Chief Magistrates continue to be supportive of the NCIS
- Information sheets produced by the NCIS
- Increase in appropriate third party user applications
- Funding obtained to support achievement of strategic goals outlined in plan

### Medium Term (2-4 years)

- Increased usage levels of the NCIS by Australian government departments at Federal, State and Local level
- State Coroners/Chief Magistrates are actively involved in NCIS activities and events
- Increased citation of NCIS data in media and academic publications
- NCIS referenced in appropriate coronial legislation around Australia
- Funding secured for 2009-2012 triennium of core funding operations
- Funding secured for NCIS Strategic Plan initiatives

### Long Term (4-5 years)

- NCIS referenced within VIFM Strategic/Business Planning documentation
- Invitations to attend and present at industry conferences and forums nationally and internationally regularly received

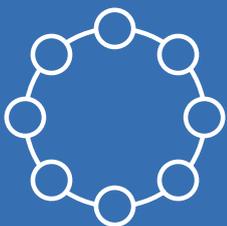
## REQUIRED FROM KEY STAKEHOLDERS TO ACHIEVE THIS GOAL:

### Human factors

- willingness of members of the various governing entities to contribute time and efforts to champion and support the NCIS
- existence of a number of State Coroners/Chief Magistrates willing to support use of the NCIS by their colleagues

### Economic factors

- resources made available for the development and co-ordination of pertinent fact sheets/reports
- funding is available from various source agencies to direct towards NCIS strategic activities



**NCIS**

National Coroners Information System  
57-83 Kavanagh St.  
Southbank 3006  
Victoria, Australia

Telephone: +61 3 9684 4414  
Website: [www.ncis.org.au](http://www.ncis.org.au)