

Access management

Research publication guidelines: Case summaries

Researchers may identify specific cases of interest in the NCIS data they are using and wish to report them in publications.

These guidelines provide advice on appropriate methods to present case summaries modelled on current NCIS Unit practices when preparing data results for external use.

Researchers must be aware of the conditions in their NCIS access agreement when preparing research results.

What is a case summary?



A case summary is a description of an individual case. These can also be referred to as case studies or include tables of individual-level data.

Developing case summaries based on NCIS data must be treated with caution as they can be potentially identifying depending on the nature of the case and the other data available within the publication.

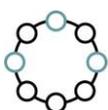
Identifying information includes any data that may identify a deceased person. This includes information about the deceased person themselves and their family or next of kin and may include other factors such as the location of residence, fatal incident or death or specific details of the individual's life or death.

Key considerations

In general, a case summary should be brief and limited only to key information required describe the circumstances or area of research being illustrated.

Given a case summary refers to a specific individual, there are several types of information that must be considered in the context of whether it makes the person identifiable. The following types of information must **not** be presented in a case summary:

- **names** including the name of the deceased as well as names of any other person mentioned in the records
- **organisations** including specific organisation names and brand names for objects such as vehicles, pharmaceutical substances and mechanical equipment
- **locations and addresses** including names of specific locations such as rivers, mountains, parks or beaches must not be included. Addresses must also be excluded from case summaries.



Other kinds of information should be considered carefully in the context of the whole publication and the details of the case to ensure it is not potentially identifying, including but not limited to:

- **specific ages** should be avoided and instead presented as a range or category. For example, *30–40 years old* or *middle aged adult*
- **specific calendar years** should be avoided where possible. For example, include a year range such as *2015–2020* instead of *2016*
- **only brief medical information details** should be included in a case summary. This includes any details of medical conditions or autopsy results
- **circumstances of death** should be brief in your description. Do not include unnecessary details
- **jurisdiction** should be considered whether it is necessary to say what state or territory the case is from.

Sex vs gender on the NCIS

NCIS Sex coding refers to biological sex characteristics (male/female), while gender refers to the social identification of sex. The Australian Bureau of Statistics advises that the correct terminology for this data item is *sex*. Information about the deceased's gender identity may be recorded in attached case documentation. Further information is available in the [NCIS data dictionary](#)

Intentional self-harm reporting

No in-depth description of intentional self-harm methods should be published. Reporting of intentional self-harm should be aligned with the [Mindframe guidelines](#).

To help protect vulnerable people in New Zealand communities, there are some restrictions in New Zealand on what can be made public about a suicide or suspected suicide. Reporting should be aligned with [New Zealand Ministry of Health advice](#)

Possible alternatives

There are appropriate alternatives that can be used to present more individual case information. Some of these include:

- Composite cases, where details from several cases are used to create a composite example.
- Fictional cases or scenarios created based on the research that are not drawn from any specific case.
- Using an existing summary from the NCIS *Fatal Facts* database.

For specific advice on how to present results for publication, contact the [NCIS Unit](#)

The following examples are not based on real cases

✓ **Do**

A middle aged male died due to injuries sustained in a vehicle incident in which they were the driver. The adult had been driving along a road at night with no street lights when they failed to navigate a corner and impacted a tree. The adult died at the scene.

✗ **Don't**

A 57 year old male died due to injuries sustained in a vehicle incident in which they were the driver. The adult had been driving along ABC Highway in Victoria at night with no street lights when they failed to navigate a corner and impacted a tree. The adult died at the scene.

✓ **Do**

An adult female died due to mixed drug toxicity. They had a history of severe back pain and doctor shopping to receive pain medication. However, they entered into a medication contract with their treating general practitioner prior to their death. This required the adult to only obtain medication from a single pharmacy. The adult had a history of recent surgical intervention and was prescribed several medications during recovery. The adult was found unresponsive in their home by their housemate. They were conveyed to hospital but were unable to be revived.

✗ **Don't**

A 38 year old female died due to combined Xanax (alprazolam) and Oxycontin (oxycodone) toxicity. They had a history of severe back pain and doctor shopping to receive pain medication. However, they entered into a medication contract with their treating general practitioner, Dr John Smith at ABC Clinic, prior to their death. This required the adult to only obtain medication from ABC pharmacy on ABC road. The adult had undergone two spinal fusion surgeries in January 2010 and May 2010, respectively, and was prescribed several medications during recovery. The adult was found unresponsive in their home by their housemate. They were conveyed to ABC hospital but were unable to be revived.

Reminders

- Case summaries should be used sparingly if at all. Aggregate data is the preferred format for NCIS research
- Refer to [NCIS Fatal facts](#) for examples of appropriately de-identified case summaries. These case summaries may be used in research but must be appropriately referenced
- Researchers should always refer to their NCIS access agreement for specific conditions relating to publishing NCIS data or research outcomes.