1. Disclosure and compliance

This document is classified **UNCLASSIFIED** and is intended for internal AFP use.

Compliance

This instrument is part of the AFP’s professional standards framework. The AFP Commissioner’s Order on Professional Standards (CO2) outlines the expectations for appointees to adhere to the requirements of the framework. Inappropriate departures from the provisions of this instrument may constitute a breach of AFP professional standards and be dealt with under Part V of the Australian Federal Police Act 1979 (Cth).

2. Acronyms

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<th>Acronym</th>
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<td>ACT</td>
<td>Australian Capital Territory</td>
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<td>AFP</td>
<td>Australian Federal Police</td>
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<td>CI</td>
<td>Criminal Investigations</td>
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<td>CIRO</td>
<td>Criminal Investigations Reception Officer</td>
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<td>FMC</td>
<td>Forensic Medicine Centre</td>
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<td>PROMIS</td>
<td>Police Real-time Online Management Information System</td>
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3. Definitions

**Chambers brief** – a police overview statement of circumstances surrounding a death which is submitted by direction of the Coroner. Although this is a summary of events, members are still required to conduct a full and thorough investigation.

**Disaster victim identification** – means a set of procedures that can be applied to a range of multiple fatality incidents, including, but not limited to:

- light plane crashes
- large-scale terrorist incidents
- air disasters involving large passenger aircraft
- natural disasters.

4. Guideline authority

This guideline was issued by the Chief Police Officer for the ACT using power under s. 37(1) of the Australian Federal Police Act 1979 (Cth) as delegated by the Commissioner under s. 69C of the Act.

5. Introduction

This guideline outlines the requirements for:
investigation of all deaths that occur within the ACT
reports to the ACT Coroner.

6. Coroner's Officers

Responsibilities

The Coroner’s Officer must coordinate and facilitate all enquiries into deaths in the ACT.

The member appointed to perform the duties of the Coroner's Officer must:

- attend the scene of a death and if appropriate, brief the Duty Coroner on the circumstances
- collect reports prepared by members relating to deaths, for immediate transmission to the Coroner
- ensure:
  - any necessary follow-up inquiries are made
  - statements are obtained
  - exhibits are made available
  - where necessary, witnesses are informed
  - a complete inquest brief is provided to the Coroner
- assist the Coroner on all court related matters
- arrange post mortem examinations, either with the duty pathologist or a forensic pathologist from the Victorian Institute of Forensic Medicine
- attend post mortem examinations and obtain written results of the findings from the pathologist
- act as the principal liaison and contact point for any dealings with the Coroner or any person acting on behalf of the Coroner.

7. Notification and responsibility

ACT Policing members must contact the Coroner’s Officer for all deaths occurring in the ACT.

Members investigating a death under the [Coroners Act 1997](https://www.legislation.act.gov.au/Legislation/Acts/1997/220) (ACT) must be mindful that any act or thing done during the investigation is considered to be on behalf of the Coroner.

Motor vehicle accidents

The ACT Collision Investigation Team is responsible for investigating and reporting to the Coroner on any deaths resulting from a motor vehicle collision.

Part 1: Scene management and investigation

8. Accurate records

When attending a death, ACT Policing members must:

- record a full and accurate description of the deceased to assist with identification
- include any physical description details, including:
  - height
• build
• estimated age
• colour of eyes and hair
• any peculiarity of the deceased

• retain and record the details of any item of clothing and all items of property found on, or with, the deceased in accordance with s. 25 below.

Members should ensure that if any fingerprints or photographs are required from the body, they are taken by a member of Forensic and Data Centres. If they are not able to attend however, the member must take photographs and load them to the PROMIS job.

9. Attending to the body

Members must never leave a body unattended, unless exceptional circumstances dictate otherwise, such as threat to life.

Where a body is in a public area and/or in the view of members of the public, it must be screened from view as much as possible until it is removed from the scene.

Depending on the individual circumstances, members should consider screening the body from public view by:

• blocking streets in the immediate vicinity
• erecting a screen around the body
• strategic placement of barriers (e.g. vehicles)
• any other appropriate means.

A body must not be moved unless authorisation has been received from the Coroner's Officer.

10. Life pronounced extinct

To meet the Coroner’s requirements, life must be pronounced extinct by a medical practitioner. Where there are no suspicious circumstances and a private medical practitioner is unavailable to attend, members must contact the on-call Forensic Medical Officer via Police Operations.

11. Death from natural causes

If a death appears to be due to natural causes and a death certificate has been issued by a medical practitioner, members must record on PROMIS the:

• full details of the medical practitioner
• date and place that life was pronounced extinct
• cause of death as listed on the death certificate.

Should the medical practitioner not attend the body but indicate that they will issue a death certificate at a later date, the investigating member must:

• inform the practitioner that the body will be at the Forensic Medical Centre (FMC) until receipt of the certificate
• notify the Coroner's Officer.
Before the body is admitted to the FMC, members must ensure that:

- life has been pronounced extinct
- the body has been identified.

12. Identification

Where a death occurs in suspicious circumstances, the body must be identified at the Forensic Medicine Centre (FMC).

If the circumstances are not suspicious, the body may be identified either at the scene or the FMC.

If appropriate, members must consider using disaster victim identification practices to assist in the identification process.

The member in charge of the inquiry must ensure the identification is accurate (i.e. a cursory glance by the person identifying the body is not sufficient). If identification cannot be ascertained visually and methods such as dental and fingerprint records or DNA comparison are viable alternatives, members must discuss which method to use with the Coroner's Officer.

Identification at the FMC must only be performed in the viewing room. Members must ensure that the body is covered and presented appropriately.

A formal statement must be taken from and signed by the identifying witness, and be signed by the member to whom identification was made.

13. Identity unknown

Where an unidentified body is found, missing persons reports must be thoroughly searched as soon as practicable. Members should contact the Missing Persons Team, Operations Monitoring Centre for any interstate enquires.

Where the identity of a deceased person remains unknown after extensive local enquiry, members must notify the Coroner's Officer.

Photographs for use in further inquiries should only be taken of the head and shoulders, however must not be taken where the body is mutilated or decomposed. If required, the mortuary assistants may be contacted via the Coroner's Officer to compose the features to obtain a life-like impression.

The Coroner's Officer should arrange forensic dental examinations if necessary.

14. Tablets, medicine and other material at death scenes

Members investigating deaths must:

- collect any tablets, medicines and drugs, or any other article which may be connected with the death and which may assist the Coroner to establish the cause of death
- specifically record the status/position of these items at the scene
- exhibit any tablets, medicines or drugs found near the deceased along with any body
samples taken for toxicology examination and record relevant details.

15. Sudden unexpected death of an infant or child

Where a member attends the sudden unexpected death of an infant or child, the member should offer the parents the service provided by SIDS and Kids as soon as practicable after arrival. The member must emphasise that a representative of the association will only attend if requested by the parents.

Where parents request the attendance of such a representative, the member should advise the Police Operations Team Leader to make the arrangements.

All investigations into the sudden and unexpected death of an infant or child must be undertaken by Criminal Investigations (CI), after consultation with the:

- Criminal Investigations Reception Officer (CIRO)
- Coroner's Officer.

Where an infant or child dies on private premises, the investigating members from CI or the Coroner’s Officer must notify:

- the AFP Video Unit
- AFP Forensics
- the Coroner's pathologist
- the on-call paediatrician from Child at Risk Health Unit via the Coroner's Officer or the CIRO.

16. Death of person entitled to diplomatic immunity

When the death is reported of a person entitled to diplomatic immunity, or a death occurs on mission premises, members may not be permitted to carry out inquiries in the normal manner.

In these circumstances members must immediately notify the:

- Coroner's Officer

must advise the Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade and assist the Coroner and other members with the investigation as required.

17. Death of person injured outside the ACT as a result of a motor vehicle accident

Where a death in a hospital in the ACT is reported, and the deceased appears to have died as a result of injuries received in a motor vehicle collision outside the ACT, a member of Traffic Operations must be tasked by Operations to investigate that death. Where a Traffic Operations member is not available, a patrol member will be directed to investigate the death.

18. Death of person visiting the ACT
When a person who has a history of ill health in their home state dies suddenly whilst visiting the ACT, the death certificate may be issued by a medical practitioner registered in the ACT. Deaths of this kind should be treated per s. 13 of the Coroners Act 1997 (ACT).

19. Suspicious deaths

In all cases where there are suspicious circumstances surrounding a death, members at the scene must:

- immediately inform the Criminal Investigations Reception Officer
- comply with guidelines relating to attendance at crime scenes
- ensure the body is photographed before removal from the scene
- ensure a member accompanies the body to the Forensic Medicine Centre.

20. Deaths in police custody

Members must consider that the Coroner may authorise the viewing of the body, scene or post-mortem by a family member, or authorise that a further post-mortem be conducted per s. 70 of the Coroners Act 1997 (ACT).

Members must notify the next of kin for all deaths in custody.

21. Drug-associated deaths

In the case of a death apparently associated with illicit drug use, the member attending the scene must immediately inform the Criminal Investigations Reception Officer (CIRO), who should nominate a member from the Drug Investigation Team to conduct a full inquiry into the circumstances of the death. In other drug related matters, the CIRO will nominate another Crime Team. The nominated member/s must compile an inquest brief of evidence.

22. Suicide

Upon attending any case of suspected suicide, members must immediately contact the Criminal Investigations Reception Officer. The team leader of the appropriate investigations team will nominate a member responsible for the investigation and compilation of the inquest brief.

Documents

Unless authorised by the Coroner, members must not divulge the contents of any documents belonging to a person who appears to have committed suicide to:

- the media
- members of the legal profession
- any other persons, including family members.

The original documents must be retained for presentation at the inquest, together with evidence of the deceased’s handwriting.

Services for the bereaved
Only the Coroner’s Officer or members investigating a suicide can request the StandBy Response Service. In all other circumstances the matter must be referred to the Coroner’s Officer before making any contact with the service.

23. Advice to next of kin

Members must notify a deceased person's next of kin as soon as possible. Where the next of kin resides in the ACT, members must deliver the advice in person.

If this advice needs to be delivered elsewhere in Australia, the investigating member must forward a request to the state or territory police station nearest the location of the next of kin.

If the next of kin resides outside Australia, the member should seek the assistance of s37(2)(b) to deliver the information through the appropriate channels. If the next of kin of a foreign national is not known, the investigating member must notify the s37(2)(b), who should then notify Diplomatic Missions.

24. No next of kin

For inquests into the death of a person with no known relatives, members must contact the Public Trustee through the Coroner’s Officer. The deceased’s personal effects, other than those required for investigation purposes, must be signed over to the Public Trustee.

25. Property management

In cases where the death is not suspicious, the body must only be searched in the presence of the undertaker who transported the body to the Forensic Medicine Centre (FMC).

In cases where the death is suspicious, a member of Forensic Services should search the body under the direction of the member in charge of the investigation and must not be searched by any other member. Property details must be entered in the s37(2)(b), s47E(d) and signed by both the member admitting the body and the undertaker.

Clothing

Unless the deceased's clothing is required for evidentiary purposes, it may be destroyed after the investigating member has obtained a signed s37(2)(b), s47E(d) from the next of kin.

If relatives of the deceased request the return of clothing, members must ensure this occurs, unless the deceased is believed to be at a high risk of infectious disease, or if the clothing is in anyway contaminated. This clothing will be destroyed as per normal biological hazard materials.

If clothing is returned to the next of kin, it must be recorded by the member and signed by the receiver in either the:

- s37(2)(b), s47E(d)
- member's notebook.

Property
Special care must be taken of any property belonging to deceased persons. Where appropriate, the investigating member must ensure that property is given to the next of kin or a member of the immediate family. Where there is no next of kin in the ACT or they cannot be located after appropriate inquiry, disposal of the deceased's property must be referred to the Public Trustee through the Coroner's Officer.

Any property removed must then be taken to a police station, recorded on a and a receipt issued to the investigating member.

Part 2: Transport and lodging of the deceased

26. Removal of bodies

Ambulances must not be used to move a body unless the Coroner’s Officer has been briefed.

**Undertaker requirements**

Members should contact Operations to make arrangements for an authorised contracted undertaker to attend and remove the body to the Forensic Medicine Centre for all deaths referred to the Coroner.

The family may nominate the undertaker of their choice and make their own arrangements, if:

- it is no longer a Coroner’s matter or
- a death certificate has been issued and
- the next of kin or a legal representative is available.

27. Lodging bodies at the Forensic Medicine Centre

Members must attend the Forensic Medicine Centre (FMC) to lodge bodies which fall into the following categories:

- suspicious deaths
- apparent suicides
- apparent drug overdoses (either prescription or illicit)
- apparent fatal motor vehicle accidents
- deaths where a person could be charged with an offence relating to the death.

The Team Leader, Police Operations should arrange for a member to:

- attend the FMC
- meet the undertaker
- lodge the body.

**Recording lodgement**

Particulars of the body must be entered in the by the attending member, along with details of any property located during the subsequent search.

Where property or clothing cannot be removed from the body, the details of that property/clothing must be recorded on the and signed by both police and the
undertaker.

The member responsible for admitting the body must:

- take the next sequential number from
- allocate this number to the body and record it on the identity tag along with the deceased's name, age and date of death
- affix the completed identity tag to the body on either ankle
- tag the body with a red tag if there are any concerns that the deceased may carry any infectious diseases
- place the body in the cool room
- ensure all windows and doors are properly secured before leaving the FMC.

**Bodies not requiring lodgement by members**

Police are not required to accompany the body/undertaker to the FMC if **all** of the following criteria are met:

- the body was identified at the scene and a statement was obtained
- the body was searched and all property removed at the scene by police/undertaker
- the property was taken into police possession and dealt with in accordance with the [AFP National Guideline on property and exhibits](#).

**Part 3: Post mortems**

**28. Attendance at post mortems**

Post mortem examinations must not be conducted without the express authority of the Coroner.

Police must attend post mortems where deaths fall within the following categories:

- suspicious deaths
- apparent suicides
- apparent drug overdoses (either prescription or illicit)
- apparent fatal motor vehicle accidents
- deaths where a person could be charged with an offence relating to the death
- deaths where the Coroner's Officer believes that the circumstances dictate that police should attend.

Members must also attend a post mortem if the contains insufficient information.

Police are not required to attend a post mortem if **all** of the following conditions are met:

- the Coroner's Officer is notified of the death as soon as practicable and given a full briefing by investigating police
- the investigating police complete a detailed prior to ceasing duty
- the is attached to the relevant PROMIS incident
- the PROMIS incident type is correctly recorded
29. Medical records

Where a death occurs in an ACT hospital, other than the Canberra Hospital, the investigating member must request the records of the deceased person from the Hospital Registrar and if:

- provided, retain the records for the information of the pathologist and the Coroner and lodge them at the Forensic Medicine Centre
- not provided, notify the Coroner's Officer.

Part 4: Submission of records and briefs

30. Forms

Where a death falls within one of the categories listed in s. 13 of the Coroners Act 1997 (ACT), before ceasing duty the investigating member must complete and distribute the relevant forms as follows:

s37(2)(b), s47E(d)
31. Chambers and inquest briefs

The Coroner's Officer must notify the investigating member if they are required to complete a chambers brief or a full inquest brief.

After completing all inquiries into a death, the investigating member must forward the brief to the Coroner's Officer. If a full brief cannot be submitted within the timeframe determined by the Coroner’s Officer, the investigating member must provide a report stating the reason for any delay.

Chambers briefs must be submitted within 60 days from the date of death.

Full inquest briefs must be submitted within 90 days from the date of death.

Statements

All witness statements must be typed and signed by the relevant witness and witnessed by the member who took the statement. This must be done even when a statement is signed and witnessed in a police notebook.

Part 5: Advice and references

32. Further advice

Queries about the content of this guideline should be referred to the Coroner's Officer.

33. References
Legislation

- Coroner Act 1997 (ACT).

AFP governance instruments

- AFP National Guideline on property and exhibits.

AFP Forms

Other sources

- StandBy Response Service
- SIDS and Kids.