



**OFFICE OF THE CHIEF MEDICAL EXAMINER
JUSTICE SERVICES DIVISION, JUSTICE & SOLICITOR GENERAL**

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INFORMATION BULLETIN

Death Investigation Update for Medical Assistance in Dying (MAID) Deaths

PURPOSE

This information bulletin is intended to update funeral homes and medical communities in Alberta about the recently changed role (as of August 20, 2018) of the Office of the Chief Medical Examiner (OCME) with regards MAID deaths.

BACKGROUND

OCME Alberta is involved in investigating MAID deaths in the province. Consequently funeral homes require a medical examiner's certificate of death to register these deaths with Vital Statistics. Since MAID has been legal in Canada, over 400 MAID deaths have been investigated by the OCME and the bodies of the deceased have been routinely centralized and brought into our facilities in Edmonton and Calgary for examination.

We have since reviewed our practices and with the support of the MAID Regulatory Review Committee, the Ministry of Health, Ministry of Justice & Solicitor General and our partners at Alberta Health Services we have moved to investigate the vast majority of these deaths through paper based file reviews starting August 20, 2018. This change has been led by feedback from families with lived experience of the process combined with the ability to continue to fulfill our mandate with this change.

NEW PROCESS

This will mean that following the death of an individual who has undergone a MAID procedure, the body will be routinely sent directly to the funeral home of choice of the family. Once the attending medical professional has pronounced death, the family can have the body taken direct to the funeral home. The medical professional pronouncing death will contact the OCME to notify us of the death. Only on rare occasions (estimated from review of investigations to date, to be approximately 0.2% of cases) will the body be required to be transported to the OCME for physical examination. This will relieve anxiety for families and facilitate allowing

grieving relatives and friends to plan for funerals, unhindered by the OCME. At the same time OCME will be able to fulfill its investigative mandate through paper based investigations into the deaths.

OPERATIONAL FLOW

1. To facilitate the registration of the death with Vital Statistics we ask that funeral homes call the OCME Investigator unit upon receipt of a decedent who has undergone a MAID procedure. This way, the OCME will be aware that you have been chosen by the family. Only a medical examiner's death certificate should be issued for MAID deaths in Alberta. No other medical professional but a medical examiner is permitted to sign a MAID death certificate. Our investigators are available 24/7/365 and can be reached at:
 - a. Tel: 403 297 8123 in Calgary for southern Alberta region deaths
 - b. Tel: 780 427 4987 in Edmonton for northern Alberta region deaths.

2. OCME investigators will then offer choices to funeral homes as to how they can obtain the medical examiner's certificate of death. The certificate should routinely be available by the next working day after the procedure so long as the requisite documents have been received from the provider (the physician or nurse practitioner) by the OCME. AHS is working with us to ensure that providers are aware of the timeliness of this document transfer. A funeral home caring for the decedent may receive a medical examiner's certificate of death in the following ways:
 - a. A fax or scanned email copy can be sent to the funeral home to allow expedient registration; the original can be sent in the mail to the funeral home or sent direct to Vital Statistics on your behalf.
 - b. The true copy can be picked up from the OCME during office hours.
 - c. A true copy can be sent in the mail to the funeral home.

The option most suitable to the funeral home can be discussed with a medical examiner's investigator at the time the funeral home connects with the OCME. With paper based reviews of these deaths the OCME will not cover transportation costs from the location of death to the funeral home as the OCME does not require physical examination of the body.

3. If on a rare occasion the decedent is required to be examined physically at the OCME we will make arrangements to have the decedent collected from the funeral home or death scene and the OCME will only issue a death certificate once the examination is complete. The funeral home will be advised when the body is ready for collection as per normal protocol. OCME will refund the cost of transportation of the body of the decedent as per normal protocol in accordance with the *Fatality Inquiries Act* Regulations should this latter scenario occur.

The OCME genuinely hopes that this new arrangement for investigating the deaths of those who have opted for a MAID process will allow the process to be less complex for grieving families here in Alberta.

AHS have also updated their public messaging and will be posting the new FAQ explaining this change of role of the medical examiner by August 20, 2018. The public FAQs hosted by AHS can be found here <https://www.albertahealthservices.ca/info/Page14382.aspx>