

20 February 2024

K Thompson
fyi-request-25226-62478ec4@requests.fyi.org.nz

Ref: OIA 109160

Tēnā koe K

Official Information Act request (OIA): Coroners Court case closure times

I refer to your email of 18 December 2023 to Stats NZ requesting information on the time taken for deaths to be investigated. On 23 January 2024, your request was partially transferred to the Ministry of Justice (the Ministry) as the information you have requested is more closely connected with the functions of the Coroners Court. Specifically, you have requested:

How long does it take for deaths to be investigated and a report to be completed?

I am advised that Stats New Zealand attempted to clarify your request in December 2023, however they did not receive a response. In order to respond to your request, the Ministry has interpreted 'deaths to be investigated' to mean Coroners Court cases. Coroners Court cases are investigations into the deaths that are reported to the coroner, in accordance with sections 13 and 14 of the Coroners Act 2006: those that appear to have been without known cause, self-inflicted, unnatural, violent, or medically unexpected. The Ministry has also interpreted 'report' to mean the coroner's findings or certificate issued at the closure of the case. Therefore, the Ministry has interpreted your request to be for information on Coroners Court case closure times.

In response to your request, please see Table 1 attached. Table 1 provides the average age in days of Coroners Court cases at closure for the 12 months ending 31 December 2023.

As your request did not specify a date range, the Ministry has provided the most recently available calendar year end data. Should you be interested in further information on Coroners Court case timeliness, you have the option to make another OIA request to the Ministry. In order to provide the most useful information for you, it would be helpful for you to specify the date range you are interested in seeking information on.

It may be helpful to note the following along with the data provided in this response. There is no prescribed timeframe for a coroner to complete an investigation. Each Coroners Court investigation depends on the circumstances of the death, with different cases requiring different evidence and information to be gathered. The circumstances of some deaths mean they may take longer to investigate. Coroners consider evidence from a range of sources and may consult with multiple agencies, such as the New Zealand Police, WorkSafe or the Health and Disability Commissioner.

Depending on the circumstances of the death, a coroner may put their inquiry on hold pending the outcome of another agency's investigation or any criminal proceedings. A case may also be reopened following a direction from the High Court or the Solicitor-General. The amount of time an inquiry is on hold, or is closed before being reopened, is included in the overall time it takes to complete a Coroners Court investigation. As a result of these factors, some inquiries will not be completed until some time after a person has died.

Please note that this response, with your personal details removed, may be published on the Ministry website at: justice.govt.nz/about/official-information-act-requests/oia-responses/.

If you are not satisfied with this response, you have the right to make a complaint to the Ombudsman under section 28(3) of the Act. The Office of the Ombudsman may be contacted by email to info@ombudsman.parliament.nz or by phone on 0800 802 602.

I trust that this information assists.

Nāku noa, nā

A handwritten signature in blue ink, appearing to read 'JRS', with a horizontal line extending to the right.

Jacquelyn Shannon

Group Manager, Courts and Tribunals, Regional Service Delivery

Ref: OIA 109160

Encl: Table 1: Average age in days of Coroners Court cases at closure for the 12 months ending 31 December 2023

Table 1: Average age in days of Coroners Court cases at closure for the 12 months ending 31 December 2023

12-month period ending	Average age in days
31 December 2023	550

Notes for Table 1:

- This data was extracted from the case management system used by the Coroners Court as at 5 January 2024 and may differ from previously released or published data.
- This data includes Coroners Court cases only, which are those cases where the coroner accepts jurisdiction for death.
- This data excludes advice cases, which are those where the coroner declines jurisdiction, and a doctor certifies the death.
- Cases are included based on the date the case was notified to the coroner, which can differ from the date of death.
- This data only includes closed cases which have a cause of death that has been determined by the coroner, where a finding or certificate has been issued in the 12 months ending 31 December 2023.
- Case age is counted as the time in days between the death being notified to the coroner and the date when the final findings were issued.