

Minister for Health  
Minister for Police, Fire and Emergency Management  
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Leader of the House



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Our Ref: 107787

Senator Malarndirri McCarthy  
Chair  
Senate Select Committee Inquiry into Stillbirth Research and Education  
PO Box 6100, Parliament House  
CANBERRA ACT 2600

Dear Senator

Thank you for your correspondence of 24 September 2018 regarding questions on notice arising from the Senate Select Committee Inquiry into Stillbirth Research and Education (the Inquiry).

The Tasmanian Government supports the efforts of the Inquiry to consider the future of stillbirth research and education in Australia. Stillbirth is an important public health issue which affects many Australian families each year, and the Tasmanian Government supports action to promote the health and wellbeing of mothers and babies.

In Tasmania, the Council of Obstetric and Paediatric Mortality and Morbidity (COPMM) investigates obstetric and paediatric mortality. COPMM publishes an annual report each year which contains a range of recommendations aimed at reducing preventable maternal and paediatric deaths and morbidity. COPMM's reports are published on its website at [www.dhhs.tas.gov.au/about\\_the\\_department/partnerships/registration\\_boards/copmm](http://www.dhhs.tas.gov.au/about_the_department/partnerships/registration_boards/copmm).

One of the primary functions of COPMM is to undertake in-depth analysis of all stillbirths in Tasmania and provide information for the education and instruction in medical theory and practice. The Tasmanian Coroner also provides advice and warnings to the broader community on findings that impact on maternal and infant outcomes.

With regards to the questions on notice arising from the Inquiry, the Tasmanian Government Department of Health (DoH) has provided the following responses.

**I. For how long can a body be stored in a Tasmanian morgue? Is this time limit articulated in legislation, regulation or policy?**

In Tasmania there is no time limit articulated in legislation, regulation or policy that defines a maximum period of time that a body can be stored in a Tasmanian morgue. All Tasmanian mortuaries are accredited facilities under the International Organisation Standard 15189 - Medical laboratories – Requirements for quality and competence.

DoH also manages an Unclaimed Deceased Person (UDP) Policy under the *Public Health Act 1997 (Tas)*. Provisions made under the UDP Policy are available when a deceased person has not been claimed. The UDP Policy provides for a basic funeral service which includes transfer and storage of the deceased person, a basic coffin, registration of death and a cremation without a service.

**2. How many deceased babies have been left in Tasmanian morgues for longer than three months?**

**a. What were the circumstances of those babies (that is, was the baby Indigenous or non-Indigenous, and what was the cause of the baby's death)?**

A review of available data shows there is no record of a baby being left in a Tasmanian morgue for longer than three months.

**3. Have Rural Maternity Units been closed in Tasmania over the last five years?**

**a. If so, how many and in what locations?**

In 2016, a change in service model in the North West Coast region of Tasmania led to a consolidation of birthing services. This decision was based the strong clinical advice of specialists to provide better and safer care for mothers and babies.

This consolidation has resulted in a safer, more sustainable service, and significantly improved recruitment and retention. Birthing services are delivered in nearby Burnie, and antenatal and postnatal services also continue to be delivered in Latrobe and Scottsdale.

**b. How many Rural Maternity Units are currently operating in Tasmania and where are they located?**

As at September 2018, there are five regional and rural maternity units in Tasmania providing birthing services. These are supported by a network of antenatal and postnatal outpatient services located across Tasmania.

Tasmania's five birthing services are located at:

- Royal Hobart Hospital (Hobart);
- Hobart Private Hospital (Hobart);
- Calvary Lenah Valley Hospital (Hobart);
- Launceston General Hospital (Launceston); and
- North West Private Hospital (Burnie).

Thank you once again for the opportunity to provide responses to the questions on notice for the Inquiry.

Yours sincerely

Michael Ferguson MP  
Minister for Health