

LEGISLATIVE ASSEMBLY OF THE NORTHERN TERRITORY

WRITTEN QUESTION

Mr Maley to the Minister for Health:

NTG Mortuary

1. What is the current capacity of the NTG mortuary?

NT Government Hospital mortuaries (total capacity)	NT Government Remote Primary Health Care Clinics (total capacity)	Total NT Government mortuary capacity
228	49	277

2. What is the cost of running the NTG mortuary on a monthly basis?

Mortuary costs are not separate and are included within the allocated budget of hospitals and primary health care.

3. Is the NTG mortuary currently at capacity?

The NT Government mortuary is not currently at capacity.

a) If so, where are the extra bodies stored?

If NT Government mortuaries do reach capacity, NT Health enacts the transfer of the deceased person to an external provider.

b) What is the cost of storing the extra bodies at a separate location?

\$33.33 per day for 30 days, plus a transfer fee of \$300 per deceased person.

4. What is the average time a body is held at the NTG mortuary?

The average time a deceased person is stored is dependent on family circumstances, cultural consideration and other external factors such as weather e.g. high water tables of burial grounds.

5. What is the process to release a body from the NTG mortuary?

In accordance with the *NT Health Management of a Deceased Person Guideline*, any arrangements regarding the release of a body must be coordinated to occur during business hours. An identified designated staff member/unit coordinates the release of deceased persons from the mortuary and manages all paperwork relating to the deceased person.

NT Health ensures that deceased bodies are released from the mortuary only when appropriate paperwork has been sighted and registers have been completed. The Mortuary Register is completed by both the Mortuary Technician and funeral home.

The deceased person must also be identified as correct by 2 people cross-checking the paperwork with the body tags for each body that is released.

The funeral provider nominated by the deceased person's family or responsible person for the collection must present appropriate documentation to the mortuary for collection. Paperwork may include:

- Medical Certificate of Cause of Death
- Medical Practitioners Certificate to Issue Permit for Cremation (if appropriate)
- Coroner's Certificate of Cause of Death and Coroner's release form (if relevant)
- Written authority from the next of kin authorising which funeral home is to conduct the funeral.

6. What happens to a body if it is not collected within a reasonable timeframe?

According to the *NT Health Mortuary Management Guideline*, if a body has not been collected within a 30 day period, Births, Deaths and Marriages will be notified by the hospital Mortuary Staff and a referral will be made to the Social Work Team, and where applicable the Aboriginal Liaison Team, who will enact a search for next of kin.

NT Health maintains contact with families on a regular basis to ensure they are progressing with making funeral arrangements and are encouraged to seek funding should they be eligible e.g. Funeral Help via Land Council or application for financial assistance via NT Government and/or Centrelink.

7. What happens if there is a dispute over the collection of a body?

a) If there is a dispute, how is it resolved?

If a dispute occurs, the parties are directed to legal and mediation services for resolution.

b) What is the average time frame for a dispute to be resolved?

Dispute resolution time varies case by case.

c) How many disputes have occurred over the last 12 months?

There has been 6 recorded disputes over the last 12 months.

8. Are there any costs associated with the return of a body from the NTG mortuary?

Yes.

a) If so, what are those costs?

Costs vary depending on final location of body. Flights or road transport costs and Funeral Service transfer fees apply to the majority of cases.

b) If so, who is responsible for the payment?

If it is a Coroner's case, the Coroner's Office will cover costs to return the deceased person to their community/country.

Repatriation costs for a Patient Travel (Patient Assistance Travel Scheme (PATS)) eligible deceased person is covered through PATS, funded by NT Health (refer to provisions for the *Death of a patient or escort during an episode of care* in the [PATS Guidelines](#)).

If it is not a Coroner's case, and the deceased person is not eligible for PATS, the next of kin is responsible for the travel/transfer costs of the deceased person.

NT Health supports families to access funding or grants which they may be eligible for e.g. Funeral Help via Land Councils, Indigent Persons Funeral Scheme.

The Indigent Persons Funeral Scheme is designed to provide financial assistance for the burial or cremation of deceased persons without financial resources and whose relatives are unable to meet the expense. It is a means of last resort and is administered through the NT Coroner's Office.

9. Are there any costs associated with the return of a body from a third party mortuary?

Funeral service fees are variable dependent on the service provided and consumer choice.

If the deceased person is eligible for PATS repatriation, this will be covered by NT Health through PATS.

If it is not a Coroner's case, and the deceased person is not eligible for PATS, the Next of Kin is responsible for the travel/transfer costs of a body being stored at a third party mortuary

10. Is there a current process that allows for the timely return of bodies for burial in a culturally sensitive way?

Yes. NT Health focuses on a family centred approach to managing return of the deceased person to Country which is unique to each deceased person's family and community circumstances.

NT Health Social Workers provide assistance at end of life to support families with information and support they need to make arrangements for their deceased family member.

Ongoing bereavement support to next of kin is provided, to support the timely return of the deceased person.

11. What happens if a body isn't collected from the mortuary?

If there is no next of kin or designated person able to make funeral arrangements, the matter will be referred to the appropriate governing body, the Public Trustee, and an indigent burial will be considered.