

# AUSTLII MEDIA RELEASE



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## Australasian Legal Information Institute

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### MAKING CORONIAL LAW ACCESSIBLE: THE AUSTRALIAN CORONIAL LAW LIBRARY

Coroners investigate the cause and circumstances of reported death and may make recommendations in their findings following investigations. Recommendations are often directed to governments and other relevant parties, to encourage them to make changes to procedures and practices to reduce the risk of preventable death. These recommendations can and do make important contributions to public policy and legislation development, particularly regarding reform processes in such areas as the health system, aged care and disability service providers, policing, corrections, public health and safety as well as human rights concerns such as deaths in custody. Despite its importance, coronial law and practice is a little understood and under-researched field.

Coroners operate within State or Territory jurisdictions and their findings have not been aggregated nationally. While each state and territory jurisdiction publishes coronial findings on their website, these are not integrated within the broader context of legal information made available online. Also, only a limited number of the responses to recommendations are available online and they are not always specifically linked to the original coronial recommendation. Comparable reports and recommendations across jurisdictions are difficult and time-consuming to find. Until now, researching Australian coronial law, for academic or professional purposes, has been sub-optimal.

In 2020 the free-access AustLII (Australasian Legal Information Institute) system, via its host universities UNSW and UTS, received funding from the Australian Research Data Commons (ARDC) to provide free access to coronial findings with recommendations available in digital form, from all Australian jurisdictions, in one central location on AustLII and to gather and link responses made by agencies to coronial recommendations. The ARDC is funded by the National Collaborative Research Infrastructure Strategy (NCRIS).

The Australian Coronial Law Library provides an expansive perspective on the coronial function over at least the past twenty years and provides free access to legislation, case law, scholarship and law reform materials relating to coronial law. It consists of 67 databases, made up of 14 coronial databases and 53 virtual databases (of related cases, legislation and articles) and includes 24,570 searchable items. Nearly 10,000 coronial findings, recommendations and responses have been processed and metadata extracted to enable a seamless integration with all other primary legal resources on AustLII (such as other court decisions referring to coronial findings, or legislation implementing them).

The intersection of the inquisitorial fact-finding coronial process with the broader justice function of courts, and the responses of the legislative system, form a vital part of the legal system. Providing easy free access to coronial findings and recommendations will assist legal practitioners, courts, tribunals and researchers to carry out their functions in other levels of the justice system.

The Library will be launched on 18 July 2023 by former Australian High Court Justice Virginia Bell AC. The Australian Coronial Law Library is at <http://www.austlii.edu.au/au/special/coronial/>.

AustLII publishes nearly 1,000 Australasian legal databases include current and historical case law, legislation, law reform reports, law journals and the largest national treaties collection on the Internet. AustLII receives about 700,000 accesses per day, and is regularly rated as Australia's most used legal website. Since its inception AustLII has provided free access for the Australian public to the essential legal information needed for the rule of law and democracy to function effectively. AustLII's broad public policy agenda is to improve access to justice through better access to information.

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