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Ontario Forensic Pathology Service  
Service de médecine légale de l'Ontario

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C24-149

**MEMORANDUM TO:** All Funeral Establishment, Transfer Service and  
Crematorium Operators  
Ontario Association of Cemetery and Funeral Professionals  
Ontario Funeral Service Association

**FROM:** Dirk Huyer, MD  
Chief Coroner for Ontario  
General Inspector of Anatomy

Jim Cassimatis, CEO/Registrar  
Bereavement Authority of Ontario

**DATE:** October 16, 2024

**RE:** Process for Cremations of Unclaimed Deceased Persons  
Warrant to Bury the Body of a Deceased Person

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Over the past three years, we have seen a marked increase in the number of deceased persons who are defined as “unclaimed” under the *Anatomy Act*. I recognize that this is having an impact not only on our organization, but on all of you as well. Given our shared responsibility in responding to unclaimed deceased persons when looking at ways to improve our processes to ensure they are consistent, effective, efficient and respectful, we reached out to the OACFP, OFSA, crematoria operators, municipal services and the Bereavement Authority of Ontario (BAO) for input. The collaborative and informative discussions were free and frank and of great value. It is clear that we share a strong belief that we need to ensure timely and respectful end-of-life care for individuals who do not have loved ones able to do it for them.

One of the most challenging topics needing resolution is managing cremations of unclaimed deceased persons. The key scenarios are:

- The deceased person had prearrangements but there is no family to sign the cremation application/contract;
- The deceased person expressed their wish for cremation prior to death but has no arrangements in place and no family to sign the application/contract;

- Family is available but unable to claim and make arrangements for one of several reasons (e.g., financial, distance, health, estrangement) but wish for cremation and will collect the cremated remains;
- There is nobody to collect the cremated remains or a family indicates they will do so but become unreachable.

The idea of cremations for unclaimed persons was relatively uncommon; however, it is becoming more frequently requested from families and/or through the wishes of the deceased persons in life. As such, in the absence of a clear approach/direction, there have been varying approaches from the funeral and crematorium community. From our discussions, it was clear that the main topic of concern is who will sign the cremation application/contract. Some organizations are comfortable following the direction provided in the “Warrant to Dispose of an Unclaimed Body” as it is signed by the General Inspector of Anatomy, but others believe a cremation application/contract is also necessary as it covers areas not detailed in the warrant.

Through our discussions we reached a solution that the associations and the BAO endorse – an additional document appended to the warrant that places the authority and responsibility with the OCC in providing direction and authorization for cremation and clearly outlines the circumstances surrounding where the request for cremation is coming from. Please see the attached sample document. This document will supplant the need for completion of a cremation application/contract.

From a process standpoint, when the OCC has an unclaimed person where direction for cremation is being provided, the warrant with the appended document will be sent to the municipality. The municipality will provide both documents to the funeral/transfer services provider for arrangement and sharing with the crematorium. The crematorium will require both documents.

**Please note that this process is effective today, October 16, 2024.**

We will provide on-line sessions for service providers and interested municipalities who would like a walk through.

### **Warrant to Bury the Body of a Deceased Person versus Warrant to Dispose of an Unclaimed Body**

Please remember that these are two distinct warrants. The Warrant to Bury the Body of a Deceased Person (if a Medical Certificate of Death has not been completed) is the document that must be provided to the Divisional Registrar to support registration of the death and provision of a Burial Permit.

The Warrant to Dispose of an Unclaimed Body is not a replacement for a Warrant to Bury the Body of a Deceased Person and does not have a role in registration of the death. If you have any questions about this process, please contact [julia.noonan@ontario.ca](mailto:julia.noonan@ontario.ca) 416-407-4271.

## **Transfer of Deceased Persons from the Forensic Services and Coroners Complex**

To ensure that all necessary preparations have occurred to support efficient transfers from the Forensic Services and Coroners Complex, please be sure to contact Provincial Dispatch Unit in advance of arrival.

Thank you for your continued collaboration in this important work. We are proud of the commitment you show to ensuring respectful, dignified and fair treatment for people, who unfortunately, do not have family who are able to make arrangements for them.

Sincerely,



Dirk Huyer  
Chief Coroner for Ontario  
General Inspector of Anatomy



Jim Cassimatis  
CEO/Registrar  
Bereavement Authority of Ontario