



HEALTH QUALITY & SAFETY  
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25 January 2018

Paul Lynch  
[fyi-request-7059-ab6b953b@requests.fyi.org.nz](mailto:fyi-request-7059-ab6b953b@requests.fyi.org.nz)

Dear Mr Lynch

### **Links between suicide deaths and addiction**

Thank you for your request of 26 December, which we received when our office reopened on 3 January. You requested:

- *...statistics from the last 5 years for suicide deaths where there is a known link with addiction to alcohol, drugs or gambling.*
- *I'd also like information for the same period for suicide deaths where the deceased were known to be on prescription medication.*

As you may be aware, in recent years the Commission has established a Suicide Mortality Review Committee (SuMRC)<sup>1</sup> to investigate how to apply mortality review methods to reduce the number of suicides in New Zealand. The report on the committee's initial findings, issued in May 2016,<sup>2</sup> examined the feasibility of the approach and this eventually resulted in funding for SuMRC to continue its work. The committee is now funded for five years and is starting a new suicide mortality review programme in 2018 after a lull in 2016-17 when no funding was available.

The 2016 SuMRC study found '[t]here are still some clear gaps in our knowledge, such as the denominator data needed to understand the risk factors collected and analysed in the trial'.<sup>3</sup> Unfortunately, the lack of denominator data means I am unable to answer your questions with any level of certainty. Currently recording of alcohol or other drug use is not routinely done by coroners in their reports on death by suicide.

Some research information suggests that the addictions you cite are likely to contribute to suicide rates, but until more reliable data is assembled and coordinated, the Commission will not be able to prove this. To my knowledge, no other government agency currently possesses this level of detail in a usable form.

This is an area SuMRC hopes to explore further and to investigate if routine recording to alcohol and other drugs can occur. I expect the committee to prioritise stronger and more integrated data to inform both suicide reduction efforts and government policy-making. Due to the scale of the work required, I cannot yet estimate when we will be in a position to answer questions like yours, but I am optimistic that real progress will be made now we are working with the sector in a focused, cross-agency work programme.

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<sup>1</sup> [www.hqsc.govt.nz/our-programmes/mrc/sumrc/](http://www.hqsc.govt.nz/our-programmes/mrc/sumrc/)

<sup>2</sup> [www.hqsc.govt.nz/assets/SUMRC/PR/SuMRC-full-report-May-2016.pdf](http://www.hqsc.govt.nz/assets/SUMRC/PR/SuMRC-full-report-May-2016.pdf)

<sup>3</sup> Report p.13.

You have the right to seek an investigation and review by the Ombudsman of this decision. Information about how to make a complaint is available at [www.ombudsman.parliament.nz](http://www.ombudsman.parliament.nz) or 0800 802-602.

Kind regards

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Janice Wilson". The signature is written in a cursive style with a horizontal line underneath.

Dr Janice Wilson  
**Chief Executive**