

State Archives and Records Authority of New South Wales

Functional Retention and Disposal Authority: FA427

This authority covers records documenting the function of forensic medicine

This retention and disposal authority is approved under section 21(2)c of the *State Records Act 1998* following prior approval by the Board of the State Archives and Records Authority of New South Wales in accordance with section 21(3) of the Act.

State Archives and Records Authority of New South Wales

Functional Retention and Disposal Authority

Authority no FA427

SR file no 22/0062

Scope This retention and disposal authority covers records documenting the function of forensic medicine.

Public office NSW Health Pathology

Approval date 8 July 2022

About the Functional Retention and Disposal Authority

Purpose of the authority

The purpose of this retention and disposal authority is to identify those records created and maintained by NSW public offices which are required as State archives and to provide approval for the destruction of certain other records created and maintained by NSW public offices, after minimum retention periods have been met.

The approval for disposal given by this authority is given under the provisions of the *State Records Act 1998* only and does not override any other obligations of an organisation to retain records.

The retention and disposal of State records

The records retention and disposal practices outlined in this authority are approved under section 21(2)(c) of the *State Records Act 1998 (NSW)*. Part 3 (Protection of State Records) of the Act provides that records are not to be disposed of without the consent of the State Archives and Records Authority of New South Wales (State Archives and Records NSW) with certain defined exceptions. These exceptions include an action of disposal which is positively required by law, or which takes place in accordance with a normal administrative practice (NAP) of which State Archives and Records NSW does not disapprove. Advice on the State Records Act can be obtained from State Archives and Records NSW.

The authority sets out how long the different classes of records generated by an organisation must be kept to meet its legal, operational and other requirements, and whether the records are to be kept as State archives. State Archives and Records NSW reviews and approves organisations' retention and disposal authorities under the *State Records Act*. It is the duty of a public office, in submitting a draft retention and disposal authority for approval, to disclose to State Archives and Records NSW any information which affects the retention of the records covered by the authority.

State Archives and Records NSW's decisions take into account both the administrative requirements of public offices in discharging their functional responsibilities and the potential research use of the records by the NSW Government and the public. One of State Archives and Records NSW's functions is to identify and preserve records as State archives. These are records which document the authority and functions of Government, its decision-making processes and the implementation and outcomes of those decisions, including the nature of their influence and effect on communities and individual lives. Criteria for the identification of State archives are listed in *Building the Archives: Policy on records appraisal and the identification of State archives*. The Policy also explains the roles and responsibilities of State Archives and Records NSW and of public offices in undertaking appraisal processes and disposal activities.

Implementing the authority

This retention and disposal authority covers records controlled by the public office and applies only to the records or classes of records described in the authority. The authority should be implemented as part of the records management program of the organisation. Two primary objectives of this program are to ensure that records are kept for as long as they are of value to the organisation and its stakeholders and to enable the destruction or other disposal of records once they are no longer required for business or operational purposes.

The implementation process entails use of the authority to sentence records. Sentencing is the examination of records in order to identify the disposal class in the authority to which they belong. This process enables the organisation to determine the appropriate retention period and disposal action for the records. For further advice see *Implementing a retention and disposal authority*.

Where the format of records has changed (for example, from paper-based to electronic) this does not prevent the disposal decisions in the authority from being applied to records which perform the same function. The information contained in non paper-based or technology dependant records must be accessible for the periods prescribed in the classes. Where a record is copied, either onto microform or digitally imaged, the original should not be disposed of without authorisation (see the *General Retention and Disposal Authority – Original or source records that have been copied*). Public offices will need to ensure that any software, hardware or documentation required to gain continuing access to technology dependent records is available for the periods prescribed.

Disposal action

Records required as State archives

Records which are to be retained as State archives are identified with the disposal action 'Required as State archives'. Records that are identified as being required as State archives should be stored in controlled environmental conditions and control of these records should be transferred to State Archives and Records NSW when they are no longer in use for official purposes.

The transfer of control of records as State archives may, or may not, involve a change in custodial arrangements. Records can continue to be managed by the public office under a distributed management agreement. Public offices are encouraged to make arrangements with State Archives and Records NSW regarding the management of State archives.

Transferring records identified as State archives and no longer in use for official purposes to State Archives and Records NSW should be a routine and systematic part of a public office's records management program. If the records are more than 25 years old and are still in use for official purposes, then a 'still in use determination' should be made.

Records approved for destruction

Records that have been identified as being approved for destruction may only be destroyed once a public office has ensured that all other requirements for retaining the records are met. Retention periods set down in this authority are *minimum* periods only and a public office should keep records for a longer period if necessary. Reasons for longer retention can include legal requirements, administrative need, government directives and changing social or community expectations. A public office **must not** dispose of any records where the public office is aware of possible legal action (including legal discovery, court cases, formal applications for access) where the records may be required as evidence.

Once all requirements for retention have been met, destruction of records should be carried out in a secure and environmentally sound way. Relevant details of the destruction should be recorded. See *Destruction of records: a practical guide*.

Organisations should review functional retention and disposal authorities regularly to ensure that they remain relevant as the organisation's functions and activities, operating environment and requirements for records change. Retention requirements may change over time. This can occur when:

- business needs or practices change
- new laws, regulations or standards are introduced
- new technology is implemented
- government administration is restructured and functions are moved between entities, or
- unforeseen or new community expectations become apparent.

State Archives and Records NSW recommends that organisations check any functional retention and disposal authorities more than 5 years old to ensure that the retention periods and disposal actions remain relevant.

Regardless of whether a record has been approved for destruction or is required as a State archive, a public office or an officer of a public office **must not** permanently transfer possession or ownership of a State record to any person or organisation without the explicit approval of State Archives and Records NSW.

Administrative change

This retention and disposal authority has been designed to link records to the functions they document rather than to organisational structure. This provides for a stable retention and disposal authority that is less affected by administrative change. The movement of specified functions between branches or units within the public office does not require the authority to be resubmitted to State Archives and Records NSW for approval. However, when functions move from one public office to another the public office that inherits the new function should contact State Archives and Records NSW to discuss use of any existing retention and disposal authority approved for use by a predecessor organisation.

Amendment and review of this authority

State Archives and Records NSW must approve any amendment to this authority. Public offices that use the authority should advise State Archives and Records NSW of any proposed changes or amendments to the authority.

State Archives and Records NSW recommends a review of this authority after five years to establish whether its provisions are still appropriate. Either the public office or State Archives and Records NSW may propose a review of the authority at any other time, particularly in the case of change of administrative arrangements, procedures or to operating environments which are likely to affect the value of the records covered by this authority.

In all cases the process of review will involve consultation between State Archives Records NSW and the public office. If the process of review reveals that this authority requires amendment, the necessary amendments should be made and approved.

Contact Information

State Archives and Records NSW
PO Box 516
Kingswood NSW 2747
Telephone: (02) 9673 1788
E-mail: govrec@records.nsw.gov.au

Functional Retention and Disposal Authority Forensic medicine

Authority number: FA427

Dates of coverage: Open

No.	Description of records	Disposal action
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1.0 FORENSIC MEDICINE

The function of carrying out post-mortem examinations and related testing for coronial and non-coronial purposes.

Note: Samples of human blood, bone, tissue, fluids, etc are not referenced in this retention and disposal authority as they are not defined as State records under the State Records Act 1998.

Please contact NSW State Archives and Records for advice where samples are managed as part of the case file.

See General Retention and Disposal Authority *Administrative records* **CONTRACTING-OUT** for records relating to the use of contractors for services.

See General Retention and Disposal Authority *HIGHER AND FURTHER EDUCATION & RESEARCH* **RESEARCH** for records relating to the conduct of forensic research projects.

See General Retention and Disposal Authority *Public health services: patient/client records* for records relating to other pathology and laboratory services.

1.1	<p>Key records of the conduct of post-mortem examinations or autopsies. Includes:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • summary and control records of autopsies performed and samples tested • consents to conduct non-coronial autopsies • directions by the Coroner regarding the autopsy process • the case management of specific individual autopsies e.g. post mortem reports (coronial and non-coronial), body diagrams, images and x-rays, pathology and test results, case sheets, forensic toxicology laboratory records etc. This includes forensic toxicology laboratory case file records that are maintained separately from the main autopsy case file. • consents to conduct research • the provision of medico-legal opinions by specialists to external persons or organisations, including case studies • licences and accreditation to conduct pathology and laboratory services. 	Required as State archives
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Forensic medicine

Authority number: FA427

Dates of coverage: Open

No.	Description of records	Disposal action
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FORENSIC MEDICINE

1.2	Records documenting the operational management of forensic medicine services. Includes: <ul style="list-style-type: none">• management of the admission, movement, release, disposal etc. of the deceased, body samples, clothing and possessions• management of requests for tests• correspondence with other forensic medicine bodies not related to an individual post-mortem.	Retain minimum of 20 years after action completed or until no longer required for forensic, coronial or business purposes, whichever is longer, then destroy
1.3	Records relating to the management of: <ul style="list-style-type: none">• next of kin support groups and individual case records associated with forensic social work interventions• liaison with Government agencies (NSW Police, Ministry of Health, local health districts etc.) and other forensic medicine bodies, including requests for hospital records.	Retain minimum of 10 years after action completed or until no longer required for forensic, coronial or business purposes, whichever is longer, then destroy