

## Chapter 4

# Social work following sudden and unexpected death

*Dorothy Ford, Anne Giljohann and Vivienne Bateman*

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### **Chapter summary**

Regardless of the place in which they work, social workers need to feel confident that they are prepared for and can respond effectively and sensitively to the bereaved following sudden and unexpected death. This chapter provides an overview of legal responses to sudden and unexpected death and considers the role that social workers have to play in offering intervention and ongoing support to the bereaved.

### **Introduction**

In 2011 in Australia almost 147,000 people died (ABS 2013). Deaths from all causes may occur suddenly and unexpectedly. They may be unintentional or intentional and can occur anywhere – at home, at work, on the sports field, on the road, in health services or anywhere else. Injury is the greatest cause

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### Additional reading

- ACGB, 2011, *Surviving Traumatic Grief: When Loved Ones Die in a Disaster – A book by people who have survived traumatic grief*, Australian Centre for Grief and Bereavement, Melbourne, Australia <<http://www.sueevansfund.com.au/>>.
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- The Sue Evans Fund for Families, 2012, *Surviving Traumatic Grief: Volume 2 for Families – A book by family members who have survived traumatic grief*, with commentary by Rob Gordon PhD <<http://www.sueevansfund.com.au/>>.

### Websites

*No claim is made as to the accuracy or authenticity of the content of the sites suggested in this chapter. Site addresses change – if the address is no longer accurate, search using keywords or the title of the organisation concerned.*

- Links to State and Territory coronial jurisdictions can be accessed via the National Coronial Information System website <[www.ncis.org.au/](http://www.ncis.org.au/)>
- Australian Centre for Posttraumatic Mental Health <<http://www.acpmh.unimelb.edu.au/>>
- Australian Child and Adolescent Trauma Loss and Grief Network <<http://www.earlytraumagriev.anu.edu.au/>>
- Australian Therapeutic Jurisprudence Clearinghouse <<http://www.aija.org.au/index.php/research/australasian-therapeutic-jurisprudence-clearinghouse>>
- Psychosocial support in disasters: a resource for health professionals <<http://www.psid.org.au/>>
- SIDS and Kids, bereavement resources <<http://www.sidsandkids.org/>>
- Support After Suicide <<http://www.supportaftersuicide.org.au/>>
- The Compassionate Friends <<http://www.compassionatefriendsvictoria.org.au/>>Victims Support Agency, *A Victim's Guide to Support Services and the Criminal Justice System* <[www.justice.vic.gov.au/victimsofcrime](http://www.justice.vic.gov.au/victimsofcrime)>

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## Notes

- 1 Tasmania and the Northern Territory far exceeded this rate (with rates of 97.2 and 60.0 per 100,000 persons respectively).
- 2 In Victoria, for example, the coroner is required to investigate 'reviewable deaths', which are deaths of a second or subsequent child of a parent as broadly defined (*Coroners Act 2008* (Vic)). The coroner does not investigate children who are stillborn nor the death of children who lived their entire lives in hospital unless otherwise determined by a coroner (Coroners Court of Victoria 2010). Medical practitioners and the Registrar of Births, Deaths and Marriages must tell the coroner when they identify a reviewable death (*Coroners Act 2008* (Vic)).