

Determination

of

Statement of Principles
concerning

SUDDEN UNEXPLAINED DEATH

ICD CODES: 798.1, 798.2.

Veterans' Entitlements Act 1986

1. This Statement of Principles is determined by the Repatriation Medical Authority under subsection **196B(2)** of the *Veterans' Entitlements Act 1986* (the Act).

Kind of injury, disease or death

2. (a) This Statement of Principles is about **sudden unexplained death**.

(b) For the purposes of this Statement of Principles, “**sudden unexplained death**” means non-traumatic death which occurs unexpectedly within 24 hours of first onset of symptoms or signs in the absence of a disease or illness which could account for the death at that time, attracting ICD code 798.1 or 798.2.

Basis for determining the factors

3. The Repatriation Medical Authority is of the view that there is sound medical-scientific evidence that indicates that **sudden unexplained death** can be related to relevant service rendered by veterans, members of Peacekeeping Forces, or members of the Forces.

Factors that must be related to service

4. The factors set out in at least one of the paragraphs 5(b) to 5(m) in clause 5 must be related to any relevant service rendered by the person.

Factors

5. The factors that must as a minimum exist before it can be said that a reasonable hypothesis has been raised connecting **sudden unexplained death** with the circumstances of a person's relevant service are:
- (a) undergoing relevant service at the time of sudden unexplained death; or
 - (b) experiencing at least one severe psychosocial stressor within the 24 hours immediately before sudden unexplained death; or
 - (c) undergoing strenuous physical activity within the 24 hours immediately before sudden unexplained death; or
 - (d) suffering a blow to the chest within the 12 hours immediately before sudden unexplained death; or
 - (e) being morbidly obese at the time of sudden unexplained death; or
 - (f) having a blood alcohol content of at least 0.15 percent at the time of sudden unexplained death; or
 - (g) suffering from diabetes mellitus at the time of sudden unexplained death; or
 - (h) suffering from hypertension at the time of sudden unexplained death; or
 - (j) being treated with non potassium-sparing diuretics within the fourteen days immediately before sudden unexplained death; or
 - (k) suffering from epilepsy at the time of sudden unexplained death; or
 - (m) using cocaine within the 24 hours immediately before sudden unexplained death.

Other definitions

6. For the purposes of this Statement of Principles:

“being morbidly obese” means having Body Mass Index (BMI) of 35 or greater, where BMI is calculated as follows:

$$\text{BMI} = \text{W}/\text{H}^2$$

where:

W is the person’s weight in kilograms; and
H is the person’s height in metres.

(for example, a person would be morbidly obese if the person weighed 120 kg and was 1.8 metres in height: $\text{BMI} = 120/(1.8 \times 1.8) = 37.04$)

“blow to the chest” means being hit on the chest by a blunt projectile such as a baseball, hockey puck or from other objects such as a football helmet, hockey stick, or karate kick. The blow is non-penetrating and does not produce traumatic injury to the heart;

“cocaine ” means a crystalline alkaloid obtained from the leaves of *Erythroxylon coca* (coca leaves) and other species of *Erythroxylon*, or by synthesis from ecgonine or its derivatives;

“diabetes mellitus” means an endocrine disease characterised by:

(a) a fasting venous plasma glucose concentration of equal to or greater than 7.8 millimoles per litre on at least two separate occasions; or

(b) a venous plasma glucose concentration equal to or greater than 11.1 millimoles per litre both within two hours and at two hours after ingestion of 75 grams of glucose;

attracting ICD code 250;

“epilepsy” means a group of chronic neurological disorders characterised by chronic, recurrent, paroxysmal changes in neurological function, caused by abnormalities in the electrical activity in the brain, with each episode of neurological dysfunction being termed a seizure, attracting ICD code 333.2, 345.0, 345.1, 345.2, 345.3, 345.4, 345.5, 345.7, 345.8 or 345.9. This definition does not include symptomatic and nonrecurrent seizures occurring acutely in response to metabolic or cerebral insult;

“hypertension” means:

(a) a usual blood pressure reading where the systolic reading is greater than or equal to 140 mmHg and/ or where the diastolic reading is greater than or equal to 90 mmHg; or

(b) where treatment for hypertension is being administered,

attracting an ICD code in the range 401 to 405;

“ICD code” means a number assigned to a particular kind of injury or disease in the Australian Version of The International Classification of Diseases, 9th revision, Clinical Modification (ICD-9-CM), effective date of 1 July 1996, copyrighted by the National Coding Centre, Faculty of Health Sciences, University of Sydney, NSW, and having ISBN 0 642 24447 2;

“non potassium-sparing diuretics” means drugs known as loop diuretics (for example, frusemide or ethacrynic acid) or those of the thiazide group;

“relevant service” means:

- (a) operational service; or
- (b) peacekeeping service; or
- (c) hazardous service;

“severe psychosocial stressor” means an identifiable occurrence that evokes feelings of substantial anxiety in an individual or which is perceived as stressful, for example, being shot at, experiencing a loss such as divorce, separation, severe illness or injury, assault, legal problems, loss of employment, major financial problems, death or serious injury in a close friend or relative;

“strenuous physical activity” means physical activity greater than 5 METs, where a "MET" is a unit of measurement of the level of physical exertion equalling 3.5ml of oxygen per kg of body weight per minute.

Dated this **Sixteenth** day of
August 1996

The Common Seal of the)
Repatriation Medical Authority)
was affixed to this instrument)
in the presence of)

KEN DONALD
CHAIRMAN