

**Northern Health**

# When a loved one dies

INFORMATION AND SUPPORT





The staff and volunteers at Northern Health would like to extend our condolences to you and those affected by the death of your loved one.

We understand this can be a difficult time and there are often unfamiliar decisions and arrangements to be made.

This booklet contains information we hope you will find useful, such as practical matters that may need to be considered, and services where you can seek further support. It also contains information about some of the feelings and emotions that may be experienced when a person dies.

It has been our privilege to care for your loved one, and our thoughts are with you at this time.



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## After a loved one has died

Take your time being with your loved one.

Speak to staff about any spiritual or cultural needs you and your loved one may have.

When you are ready to leave the hospital, please notify ward staff. Your loved one will then be moved to a place within a Northern Health facility or a nearby funeral director. The funeral director of your choice will then arrange the transfer of your loved one into their care.

### **Death Certificate**

A doctor will confirm your loved one has died and will notify Registry of Births, Deaths and Marriages. The funeral director you have chosen will usually apply for a standard death certificate on your behalf. You can advise them to whom you would like the death certificate sent. When the death certificate arrives, it is suggested you have someone with you when you open it.

For further information, please contact the Registry of Births, Deaths and Marriages on 1300 369 367 or [www.bdm.vic.gov.au](http://www.bdm.vic.gov.au)



## **Coroner's Cases**

Sometimes a doctor may refer cases to the Coroner to determine the cause(s) of death. Ward staff will advise you if this is required.

For further information, please contact the Coronial Admissions and Enquiries on 1300 309 519 or [www.coronerscourt.vic.gov.au](http://www.coronerscourt.vic.gov.au)

## **Financial Assistance**

Depending on your situation, you may be eligible to receive Government financial assistance. For further information, please contact Centrelink on 13 23 00 or [www.centrelink.gov.au](http://www.centrelink.gov.au)

## **Wills**

A Will is a legal document that states how a person's assets are to be distributed after their death. You will need to locate your loved one's Will so the Executor can follow their wishes. If you are unable to locate it or if there is no Will, you may need to seek legal advice from your solicitor or other legal services (refer to page 12) to guide you through this process.



# Grief

Grief is our response to loss. It is the normal and natural response to loss, and it can affect every part of our life, including our thoughts, behaviours, beliefs, feelings, physical health and our relationships with others.

Everyone grieves in their own way. It is individual and personal. There is no 'right' or 'wrong' way to grieve and grief has no timeline. When people grieve they are coming to terms with what has changed in their lives.

There are many things we may experience and all are a 'normal response'. Some examples are:

*Feelings of:*

- Sadness
- Anxiety and panic
- Anger and irritability
- Disbelief
- Relief
- Numbness.



*Physical symptoms:*

- Difficulty in sleeping
- Fatigue and tiredness
- Lack of appetite
- Headaches
- Nausea
- Aches and pains.

*Social:*

- A loss of interest in the things you used to enjoy
- A lack of interest in outings, seeing friends, or doing your normal household chores, shopping, meals, etc
- A lack of interest in what's happening in the world
- Being over-protective of close family and friends.



## Looking after yourself

Taking the time to look after yourself can help you cope on a daily basis. Below are some suggestions that you may find helpful.

- Ensure you maintain normal routines where possible e.g. regular meals, adequate sleep, exercise.
- Allow people to help you.
- Do things that are relaxing or soothing e.g. reading, listening to music, making a special place to reflect, gardening, walking, having a massage, meditating.
- Share your memories, stories, thoughts and feelings with friends and family. This can reduce the sense of isolation and loneliness that comes with grief.
- Try to delay making major decisions that cannot be reversed such as selling a home or giving away belongings. The early months can be filled with many emotions and may not be the best time to make these decisions.
- Allow yourself to express your thoughts and feelings privately, e.g. keeping a journal, collecting photos, drawing, writing a letter or a poem.
- Consider joining a support group to share with others who have had similar experiences.





Most people find that with the support of their family and friends and their own resources, they gradually find ways to learn to live with their loss and do not need to seek professional help.

Sometimes, however, the circumstances of a death may have been particularly distressing such as a traumatic or sudden death, or there may have been other situations in your life which make your grief complicated.

If you are finding it hard to manage on a daily basis, it may be helpful to speak to your doctor who may talk to you about support from other health professionals e.g. counsellor, psychologist.



## Young people and grief

When children or young people experience a death, their parents, caregivers and teachers are often concerned about how best to support and meet their needs.

Children and young people also experience grief in a variety of ways depending on their age, stage of development, personality, and past experiences of loss.

Some common reactions that may affect them include:

*Feelings of:*

- Shock and disbelief that the person has died
- Sadness
- Fear
- Guilt
- Anger
- Anxiety about the future
- Preoccupation with death and wanting details.

Younger children may ask the same questions repeatedly over a period of time. Continue to answer simply and honestly.



*Physical:*

- Changes to sleeps patterns and appetite
- Headaches, tiredness, nausea, “sore tummies”
- Difficulty concentrating or remembering things.

*Social:*

- Clinging to remaining family members — especially in younger children
- Disruptive behaviours — fighting, arguing, ignoring requests
- Reluctant to go to school
- Withdrawal from social activities
- Mood swings
- Need for checking on other family members and wanting to be physically close to them.



## Caring for grieving young people

Below are some suggestions that you may find helpful in caring for children and young people.

- A good place to start is asking them what they know. Talk openly and honestly with them about what has happened in an age appropriate way e.g. “Grandma has died because her body stopped working properly”.
- Listen. They may not want to talk straight away but continue to check in case they change their mind.
- Try to include children in the family's grief experience e.g. attending the funeral if they wish. If they choose to attend, prepare them as much as possible beforehand so they know what to expect. Older children and young people may want to have a more active part in the service.
- Reassure them that they will continue to be cared for and loved.
- Children, especially younger ones, express many of their emotions through behaviour and play. They may find drawing, painting, storytelling, even



making a memory box with photos and letters, helpful. In addition, older children may also like to create a journal or a poem.

- Discuss their support needs with their school teachers.
- Maintain routine as much as possible e.g. sports, hobbies, contact with friends.
- Reassure them that it is okay to grieve differently to other family members.

It is important to take care of yourself, both physically and emotionally, so you can support your children.

Don't be afraid to ask for help.

*With good information, love and support, children and young people can learn to understand and cope with their grief. However, if you feel that they may need further assistance or support, don't hesitate to see your local doctor who may talk to you about support from other health professionals e.g. school counsellor, psychologist.*



## Who to notify check list

*The following checklist details some people or organisations you may need to contact about the death. Some may not need to be contacted immediately.*

Person/Organisation be contacted	Contact person, phone number and address (if needed)	Details of person who died (e.g. account or reference number)	Notified to of death (Yes/No)
Accountant			
Australian Taxation Office	13 28 65		
Banks/Credit Unions			
Centrelink	13 23 00		
Child Support Services	13 12 72		
Community Groups or Clubs (e.g. RSL, sporting, social/cultural)			
Department of Veterans' Affairs (DVA)	13 32 54		
Australian Electoral Commission	13 23 26		
Employers/ Business Partners			



Person/Organisation be contacted	Contact person, phone number and address (if needed)	Details of person who died (e.g. account or reference number)	Notified to of death (Yes/No)
Equipment Hire (e.g. hospital, private hire)			
Executor of the Will			
Foreign Pension Authority (Centrelink's International Services)	13 16 73		
Funeral Director			
Funeral Insurance	(Yes/No)		
Health Benefits Fund			
Health Professionals (e.g. doctors, case manager, dentist, podiatrist)			
Insurance Companies (e.g. car, home and contents, life)			
Landlord/Real Estate Agent			



Person/Organisation be contacted	Contact person, phone number and address (if needed)	Details of person who died (e.g. account or reference number)	Notified to of death (Yes/No)
Local Council and Community Services (e.g. Meals on Wheels, library, rates, home help, RDNS)			
Local Post Office			
Medicare	13 20 11		
Public Trustee			
School/ University/ College			
Solicitor/ Lawyer			
Superannuation Fund			
Utilities (e.g. gas, electricity, water, phone, internet, Citylink)			





Person/Organisation be contacted	Contact person, phone number and address (if needed)	Details of person who died (e.g. account or reference number)	Notified to of death (Yes/No)
VicRoads (licence vehicle registration)	13 11 71		
Other:			

Adapted from the Department of Health and Human Services **"Who to notify checklist"**



# Support services

*The following Support Services are a guide to some of the services available.*

## **Grief and Bereavement Services**

### General Practitioner (local doctor)

A good starting point is to talk to your local doctor about how you are feeling. If needed, they can refer you to other health professionals for further support.

### Community Health Services (CHS)

CHS may offer free or low cost counselling for adults, children and young people. Please contact your local service under Community Health Centres and Services by searching on the internet.

### The Australian Centre for Grief and Bereavement (ACGB)

The ACGB is a not-for-profit organisation providing a range of education, specialist counselling, research and clinical services in the field of grief and bereavement. Counselling for adults, children and young people – phone counselling available (fees may apply).

9265 2100 or 1800 642 066

[www.grief.org.au](http://www.grief.org.au)

### Victorian Aboriginal Health Service (VAHS)

VAHS offers free counselling for families within the Aboriginal community.

9403 3300

[www.vahs.org.au](http://www.vahs.org.au)



## Telephone and Online Counselling Services

### GriefLine

Counselling support services for individuals and families.

9935 7400 (12 noon to 3 am)

1300 845 745 (regional only)

[www.griefline.org.au](http://www.griefline.org.au)

### Kids Helpline

Counselling support service for kids and young people aged 5 to 25.

1800 551 800 (24 hours)

[www.kidshelpline.com.au](http://www.kidshelpline.com.au)

### Lifeline

Crisis support and suicide prevention services.

13 11 14 (24 hours)

[www.lifeline.org.au](http://www.lifeline.org.au)

### Beyond Blue

Information and support for mental health and wellbeing.

1300 224 636 (24 hours)

[www.beyondblue.org.au](http://www.beyondblue.org.au)

### Headspace

Information and support for young people and their families.

1800 650 890

[www.eheadspace.org.au](http://www.eheadspace.org.au)

### SuicideLine

Crisis support and counselling services.

1300 651 251 (24 hours)

[www.suicideline.org.au](http://www.suicideline.org.au)



### Stillbirth and Newborn Death Support (SANDS)

Support and information when a baby dies before, during or soon after birth.

1300 308 307 (24 hours)  
[www.sands.org.au](http://www.sands.org.au)

### Red Nose

Support for families who have experienced the sudden and unexpected death of a baby or child, during birth, pregnancy or infancy.

1300 308 307 (24 hours)  
[www.rednose.org.au](http://www.rednose.org.au)

## Financial assistance

### Centrelink

You may be eligible to receive Government financial assistance and services.

13 23 00 or 13 12 02 (multi-lingual)  
[www.centrelink.gov.au](http://www.centrelink.gov.au)

### Financial Counselling Australia

Free phone information and support to people experiencing financial difficulty. If needed, they can refer onto other services.

1800 007 007  
<https://www.financialcounsellingaustralia.org.au/>

## Legal assistance

### Victoria Legal Aid

Free legal information.

1300 792 387  
[www.legalaid.vic.gov.au](http://www.legalaid.vic.gov.au)



### Federation of Community Legal Centres

Free legal assistance for those experiencing financial or social disadvantage.

9652 1500 (to find your local centre)

<https://www.fclc.org.au/>

### Victorian Aboriginal Legal Services

Free legal advice and representation for the Koorie community.

9418 5999 or 1800 064 865

[www.vals.org.au](http://www.vals.org.au)

## Other services

### Bereavement Assistance Funeral Service

Low cost funeral services for those who have limited or no funds.

9564 7778

[www.bereavementassistance.org.au](http://www.bereavementassistance.org.au)

### Translating and Interpreting Services

Free telephone interpreting service for persons from culturally and linguistically diverse backgrounds.

131 450 (24 hours)

[www.tisnational.gov.au](http://www.tisnational.gov.au)

### Registry of Births, Deaths and Marriages

1300 369 367

[www.bdm.vic.gov.au](http://www.bdm.vic.gov.au)

### Coroner's Court of Victoria

1300 309 519

[www.coronerscourt.vic.gov.au](http://www.coronerscourt.vic.gov.au)

**Please note:**

This booklet has been developed as a resource for patient carers, advocates and family members. Attention has been given to ensure that the information is current at the time of publication.

However, the material is not definitive or exhaustive. The information provided through this publication is not intended to provide or substitute for professional services or advice, including grief counselling or therapy.



Northern Health acknowledges the Traditional Custodians of this land and pays respects to Elders past, present and future.



If you need an interpreter  
please speak to a staff member  
or call us via TIS on 131 450

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