



When a Loved One Dies in hospital

The Royal Melbourne Hospital hopes the information included in this booklet will be helpful at this time and in the future.

The following pages contain practical information for bereaved family and friends.

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Who do I notify after someone dies?

When someone dies a number of people and organisations need to be told. This helps to finalise the person's affairs and makes sure you can get the help you need. These organisations can be contacted when you feel ready to do so. There is no hurry.

See pages 8-9 for a checklist of organisations to notify of a loved one's death. See page 10 for a sample letter.

Before you start, it might help to have a look around and see if the person who died had a filing cabinet, folder or document case. They may have records that show dealings with any of the contacts on the checklist. You can use these records to find out important reference numbers such as a customer reference number (e.g. Medicare number, health fund membership number or car registration details).

Important documents to look for:

- Will
- Birth and marriage certificates
- Property deeds and mortgage papers
- Loan details (home loans, personal loans etc.)
- Lease agreement (setting out legal entitlements for a rented property)
- Taxation records (with details of income and assets)
- Insurance policies such as home, contents and car
- Life insurance and superannuation policies
- Bank account details
- Any documents about prepaid funeral arrangements or burial plots.

While many organisations may require a copy of the death certificate before they take action on your advice, it is wise to provide advice of the death as soon as possible.

Death Certificate

A doctor must sign the death certificate before funeral arrangements can be made. Once the certificate has been signed, the Funeral Director can take charge of the body and start making funeral arrangements. The Funeral Director will usually register the death with the Victorian Registry of Births, Deaths and Marriages (BDM) and send the death certificate to BDM. In unusual cases, for example if an autopsy or coronial inquiry is conducted, the original death certificate may be issued with no cause of death noted and a second one issued once a cause of death is determined. You can, however, use the first one for most matters.

Organising the funeral

A Funeral Director can arrange the funeral for you. They will arrange for certificates for the burial or cremation service and can arrange a viewing if you wish. The Funeral Director can also arrange other things like newspaper notices, flowers and religious/celebrant services. Remember, while you do need to engage the services of a Funeral Director to arrange a burial or cremation, you do not need to have a formal funeral service.

Family or friends may be able to recommend a Funeral Director. You can also search for Funeral Directors on the internet, in the Yellow Pages, or by contacting:

Australian Funeral Directors Association

Phone: 1300 888 188

Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples requiring support and assistance with funeral arrangements can contact the Victorian Aboriginal Funeral Service at:

Aboriginal Advancement League

2 Watt Street

Thornbury, Victoria. 3071

Phone: (03) 9480 7777

Insurance policies

Sometimes private health insurance, sickness and accident insurance or life insurance policies may contribute toward funeral and other payments. Each company will have their own conditions.

If you find out the person who died had any insurance like this, speak to your chosen Funeral Director who can help you with the required paperwork for the insurance.

Funeral bonds and prepaid plans

If you think there was a prepaid funeral or funeral bonds, but cannot find the relevant papers, the papers may have been left with someone responsible such as a next of kin, solicitor, the public trustee, a trusted friend or the executor of the will. You can also phone the local funeral directors as they usually have their own lists of pre-paid bonds/plans that they can check on your behalf. If one is found, speak with your chosen Funeral Director about how to access the money.

The Will

The will is a legal document that sets out the wishes of the deceased in regards to how their belongings are to be distributed after their death and may include information regarding their wishes for funeral arrangements.

The executor of the will is responsible for distributing the person's assets to the people named in the will as beneficiaries. This happens after any debts are paid. You may wish to obtain legal advice to help. If you are unable to find any will legal advice may be necessary.

Removing someone's name from mailing lists

If you want to have the name and telephone number of the person who has died removed from mailing lists; register their details on the Association for Data-driven Marketing and Advertising website (www.adma.com.au/) or write to:

ADMA
GPO Box 3895
Sydney NSW 2001

Checklist of people/organisations you may need to contact

The checklist within this booklet shows you most of the people and organisations you may need to contact. It might be easier for you to notify some of these people and organisations in writing. You can use the sample letter provided within this booklet as a guide for this.

See checklist on pages 8-9 and sample letter on page 10.

Person/organisation to be contacted	Contact details	Notified of death Yes/No	Details of person who died e.g. account number
Australian Electoral Commission	132 326		
Australian Taxation Office	132 861		
Banks, credit unions, building societies			
Centrelink	132 300		
Credit card/hire purchase companies			
Community services (Bolton Clarke, RDNS)			
Department of Veterans' Affairs	133 254		
Employer/s			
Executor of the will			
GP /specialist practitioners			
Health benefits fund (e.g. Medibank, BUPA)			
Insurance companies			
Landlord/real estate agent/tenants			
Local council			
Local post office			

Person/organisation to be contacted	Contact details	Notified of death Yes/No	Details of person who died e.g. account number
Medicare	132 011		
Minister of religion			
My Aged Care	1800 200 422		
Professionals such as solicitor, accountant, financial advisor			
Superannuation fund			
Subscriptions			
Telecommunication providers such as phones, internet			
Utilities such as gas, electricity and phone companies			
Vehicle registration and licensing authorities			

Sample letter for informing contacts of a person's death:

To whom it may concern,

I wish to notify you of the death of:

Mr / Mrs / Miss / Ms Surname.....

Given names

Date of birth

Street name and number

Suburb.....

State Postcode

I understand (above) had dealings with your organisation. Please amend your records to reflect her/her passing.

The reference number/ membership/ client number for your organisation was:

.....

If you need to contact me for further information,

Name and Address:

Relationship to deceased:

Signature:

Date:

Useful contacts and websites:

Telephone Interpreting Service

Ph: 131 450

Griefline

Ph: 1300 845 745

www.griefline.org.au

Australian Centre for Grief and Bereavement

Ph: 1800 642 066

www.grief.org.au

Cancer Council Helpline

Ph: 13 11 20

<http://www.cancervic.org.au/>

Australian Funeral Directors Association

Ph: 1300 888 188

www.afda.org.au

Births, Deaths and Marriages

Ph: 1300 369 367

www.bdm.vic.gov.au

Centrelink

Ph: 13 23 00

www.humanservices.gov.au

Department of Veteran's Affairs

Ph: 1800 555 254

www.dva.gov.au

Australian Indigenous Health Info Net

www.healthinfonet.ecu.edu.au

State Trustees

Ph: 9667 6444/1300 138 672

www.statetrustees.com.au

Lifeline (24-hour crisis line)

Ph: 13 11 14

www.lifeline.org.au

Kids Help Line

Ph: 1800 551 800

www.kidshelp.com.au

Men's Line Australia

Ph: 1300 789 978

Homicide Victims Support Group

Ph: 0459 430 946

Road Trauma Services

Ph: 1300 367 797

Victorian Aboriginal Health Service

Ph: 9419 3000

www.vahs.org.au

The Compassionate Friends

Ph: 1800 641 091

www.compassionatefriendsvictoria.org.au

What if someone dies overseas?

www.smartraveller.gov.au/tips/death_overseas.html

You can also contact your **General Practitioner (GP)**

Grief

Grief is a normal emotional and physical response when we have experienced a significant loss or change in our lives. Grief allows you to gradually adjust to your loss and find a way of going on with your life without the person who died. The death of someone we love and the grief which follows are, for many of us, the most painful experience imaginable. Bereaved people often find themselves worried and confused by the intensity of their thoughts and feelings and wonder if they are grieving properly.

At the outset, it is important to emphasise:

- Everyone grieves differently. There are no set rules.
- You are the best judge of how you are coping. Trust your feelings.

Most people will have an idea about the sort of thoughts and feelings commonly experienced after the death of someone we care about.

They include:

- anger and irritability
- deep sadness, loneliness and sudden crying
- guilt and self-blame
- disbelief, shock and feeling numb
- disrupted sleep and fatigue
- anxiety, headaches and forgetfulness
- constant thinking or dreaming about the deceased person

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- lack of concentration and motivation
 - avoidance of people and social situations
 - sense of relief and a feeling of acceptance
 - confusion and disbelief

Our thought processes can alter for a time. Being vague and forgetful, fear of going crazy, too much sleeping (or lack of it), tiredness, and change in appetite are normal. Some people say they see or hear the person who has died.

Our bodily systems can also change; more infections, coughs, colds and high blood pressure all occur with some grieving people and can be checked by your doctor.

The list above shows only *some* of the more common aspects of grief. They are some of the things you might experience, not the things you should experience in order to grieve properly. Don't worry if you have not felt everything included in the list, it doesn't mean that you are grieving the wrong way or any less.

Grief is an individual response to an individual loss.

What can help?

Although there is no guaranteed way of coping with grief, there are some things you can do which to help make the time ahead a little easier.

- Talk about the person who has died as much as you need. Putting feelings and memories into words and sharing those words with others is how we heal.
- Keep a diary or a journal. Recording feelings, special events or significant memories can help bring a more complete understanding of how you are coping and can gradually help to ease the pain. Write as much as you need, as often as you need.
- As time passes set yourself small challenges. These can be very simple, for example, making lunch for yourself, going to the shops, phoning a friend, or even cleaning the bathroom. Don't make the challenge too hard and don't worry if you don't manage it straight away. Over time this exercise will slowly get you into the habit of focusing on tasks in a relaxed way.
- Take time out to be alone. For many people the most significant grieving they experience happens when they are spending some quiet time in solitude. These times, without the distractions of other people, are moments which you can dedicate to the person who has died and to your feelings for them.
- Gentle exercise helps clear the mind and to release nervous energy. A brief walk every day can make an enormous, positive difference.

Problems?

Grief can become a problem for people if they find themselves acting in ways which could lead to harm for themselves or people around them. These can include:

- not eating or drinking for extended periods
- not resting or spending any time at home or alone
- not seeking medical advice about health issues
- refusing to see or speak with supportive friends or relatives
- continued lapses of concentration when driving
- difficulty controlling temper with family and friends
- flashbacks or intrusive memories or images of the death
- avoidance of particular places or activities which are associated with the person who has died or their death itself
- thoughts of suicide

These are all common experiences following a sudden death and can generally be resolved by talking about your thoughts and feelings with a close friend, your doctor or counsellor. They are not something to become anxious about, but it's worth being aware of them. If you find they are continuing to bother you following the death, consider talking with your doctor or a counsellor about the situation.

The Future

The most common pattern for grief is for people to go through a series of highs and lows, their emotions going from laughter to sadness to hope to despair, often in the space of a few minutes. As the months pass, the mood swings become less drastic: the periods of happiness less over the top, the periods of sadness less painful.

When we are grieving, we need to be kind to ourselves and not make judgements on our own behaviour.

For most people the period of intense grief lasts for six months to a year. It's a good idea to avoid making any big decisions (like selling the house or moving) until the first anniversary of the death has come and gone.

At a certain point you will realise that you haven't cried for a whole day, or that you've slept through the night without once waking up suddenly. This won't mean that you have forgotten the person who has died, or that you love them any less. It simply means that you are starting to heal.

Even at that point, be prepared for ups and downs. Grief is slow and confusing. It doesn't go through a clear set of stages and it doesn't suddenly go away.

*The management and staff of
the Royal Melbourne Hospital
wish to express our sincere condolences
to you and your family.*

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Contact

You may wish to contact the area where your loved one was cared for. You can do this via the switchboard.

RMH City Campus: 9342 7000

RMH Royal Park Campus: 8387 2000



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The information contained in this brochure is for educational purposes only and is not intended as a substituted for consultation with a doctor or health care professional
