



Government of Western Australia  
North Metropolitan Health Service  
Women and Newborn Health Service



# Grief and Loss Advisory Council

## Bereavement support after the death of a loved one



The death of someone you love or care for can be a difficult experience and there are often unfamiliar choices and arrangements to be made. This booklet aims to support individuals and families by providing information about some of these arrangements including:

- ▶ Hospital care
- ▶ Registering a death
- ▶ The role of the Coroner's Office
- ▶ Organ and tissue donation
- ▶ Funeral arrangements
- ▶ Financial assistance
- ▶ Understanding and coping with grief
- ▶ Supporting others
- ▶ Accessing support services
- ▶ Organisations and people to notify

## Hospital care

When someone dies in hospital their family, friends and other support people are welcome to spend time with them. You may have already said your goodbyes but we will offer you the opportunity to spend some more time with your loved one if you wish. You might choose this time to say the things you haven't had the chance to say, or just sit with them, hold them or say your goodbyes - whatever you are most comfortable with is the right choice. This is your time and it is precious and special. Do not feel rushed. Some people wish to have some private time with their loved one but find it hard to speak to other family members about it. Please ask our staff who can support you with this.

You can also let our staff know about any rituals that you may want conducted at the time of death or immediately after. We are committed to meeting the cultural needs of individuals and families.

The usual practice, and in consideration of cultural wishes, is to wash the deceased and prepare them for transfer to the funeral home. Please be reassured that we will continue to treat your loved one with great respect and dignity during this time.

King Edward Memorial Hospital does not have a mortuary for adult patients. Purslowe Funerals have agreed to collect, transport and care for the deceased (at no cost) until the family makes funeral arrangements. There is no obligation on the family to use Purslowe Funerals for their service. If you have already contacted a different funeral company they may collect the deceased from the hospital so long as they can accommodate the transfer immediately.

Once the deceased has been transferred to the funeral home further viewing can be arranged by contacting the funeral director.

## Your health care team

A number of hospital staff are available to help you at this time including:

### **Social workers**

Social workers can provide emotional support and information on the grief process and funerals, and assist with contacting support services and resources as needed.

Ph: (08) 6458 2777

### **Doctors**

The consultant doctor providing care can give you more information about medical issues, including the results of any tests or investigations.

Ph: (08) 6458 2222

### **Pastoral care team**

The hospital has a pastoral care team who can offer support and comfort, regardless of your religious affiliation or beliefs. There is also a hospital chapel for your use.

Ph: (08) 6458 1036

### **Psychological Medicine**

Clinical psychologists and psychiatrists can provide emotional support for bereaved families and individuals.

Ph: (08) 6458 1521

## Registering a death

A doctor must certify the death, determine the time of death and complete the Medical Certificate of Cause of Death. This is used to register the death with the WA Registry of Births, Deaths and Marriages. This must be completed prior to the funeral. The funeral director may be able to help with registering this form.

The Registry is responsible for issuing an official death certificate, which is needed to settle the person's estate. You can make contact with the Registry office to find out how long this may take - Registry of BDM 1300 305 021. Many funeral directors include the cost of a full death certificate in the funeral expenses, so you will receive the certificate in the mail automatically. Otherwise, the Registry will send an extract of the certificate to the next of- kin. A full certificate is available for a fee.

## Sudden death and the coroner

The hospital must notify the Coroner's Office if a death is sudden and/or unexpected or the cause of death is unknown. A representative of the Coroner, usually a police officer, will attend the hospital and arrange for the deceased to be transferred to the State Mortuary at Queen Elizabeth II Medical Centre.

The next-of-kin will be provided with a copy of the Coroner's brochure *When a Person Dies Suddenly – Information for Families*. The Coroner's Office also provides a liaison service to assist with communication between the family and all other parties.

To determine the cause of death a post mortem examination may be necessary. If so, a representative from the Coroner's Office will explain the procedure to the next-of-kin.

## Hospital post mortem examination

Sometimes doctors will request a post mortem examination to further understand a person's illness and to determine the cause of death. This can only be done with consent from the next-of-kin. If a post mortem is to be performed the deceased will be transferred to the State Mortuary.

## Organ and tissue donation

The death of someone close to you can be a distressing time but it is also the time that the possibility of organ and tissue donation may be raised with you. In Australia, family consent is needed before a donation can proceed. There is a limited time frame for this to occur so the subject may be discussed early.

If you are aware of your family member's wishes and decide to pursue donation, please ask hospital staff to contact the donor coordinator immediately.

## Funeral arrangements

A funeral director will be required to help arrange the funeral, which may be a burial or a cremation. A funeral or memorial service may be requested and arranged by someone of your choice. This may be a religious minister, a celebrant or the funeral director. The hospital chaplain can provide information and advice on this. There is usually no urgency for this to occur, however some faiths and cultures require arrangements to take place quickly.

## Financial assistance

Depending on your circumstances and your relationship to the person who died, you may be eligible to receive government financial assistance. Support payments from the Department of Human Services, Centrelink, such as the *Bereavement Payment or Bereavement Allowance*, may be available to you after the death of your partner, a child or someone in your care.

For more information about Centrelink's Bereavement Services, including eligibility criteria, visit their website [www.humanservices.gov.au](http://www.humanservices.gov.au) or call 13 23 07

The *Bereavement Assistance Program* provides assistance to families having difficulty paying for funeral costs. This is a means tested program and is administered through the Department for Child Protection.

For more information, including eligibility criteria, visit the Department's website [www.dcp.wa.gov.au](http://www.dcp.wa.gov.au) or call (08) 9222 2555 or Country free call 1800 854 925

## Further information and help

You can find more useful contacts, including a list of counselling and bereavement services on page 5 of this booklet.

The Department of Human Services, Centrelink have produced a checklist of people and organisations you may need to contact after someone dies. A copy of this can be found on page 7.

## Understanding and coping with your grief

Grief is a normal response to death. Following a significant loss you may experience a wide range of emotions which can include shock, anger, guilt, fear, numbness, helplessness, disbelief and distress. Everyone grieves differently, it is a personal and very individual experience. How you grieve depends on many factors, including your personality and coping style, your life experience, your faith, and the type of loss. There are variations in grief responses in different cultures and reactions to loss are influenced by cultural and religious beliefs. The grief process takes time. It is important to be patient with yourself and allow the process to happen gradually.

### Common symptoms of grief

It is important to remember that there is no right or wrong way to feel or express grief. The following are just some of the more commonly described responses to grief.

- ▶ Shock and disbelief – Immediately following a loss, it can be difficult to accept what has happened. You may feel numb and have trouble believing that the loss has really happened. You might talk about your loved one as if they are still alive.
- ▶ Anger – You may feel angry and resentful at yourself, the doctors, God, or towards the person who has died for having left you.
- ▶ Guilt – You may feel regret or guilt about the things you did or did not say or do. You may also feel guilty about feeling relieved if the person died after a long illness.
- ▶ Fear – You may feel anxious and worried. The death may remind you of your own mortality, of coping with life without that person, or the responsibilities you now have to take on.
- ▶ Sadness – Intense sadness is often the most common symptom of grief. You may feel hopeless, overwhelmed, empty and lonely. There may be lots of tears and feeling as if you are on an emotional roller coaster.
- ▶ Physical symptoms – Grief is often expressed physically, such as fatigue, nausea, aches and pains, reduced appetite, poor concentration and trouble sleeping. Talk with your GP if you are experiencing physical symptoms.

## Tips for coping with your grief

- ▶ Find people to support you and try not to grieve alone. When family and friends offer help, accept it. Sometimes people want to help but are not sure how to help. Tell them what you need, whether it is just spending time with you, helping you sort things out, cooking for you, or continuing to include you in social activities. You may want to consider joining a support group.
- ▶ Acknowledge how you feel. You may want to keep a journal about your feelings. Remember to look after your physical health by getting enough sleep, eating well and perhaps trying some light exercise like walking and swimming. Try not to use alcohol or other drugs to numb your grief.
- ▶ Plan ahead for times that might 'trigger' your grief: anniversaries, holidays or significant life events can be difficult at times. This is normal. Talk with those who may be involved in the event. Let them know how you are feeling and how you might want to acknowledge your loved one.
- ▶ If you have a faith or religion you may find that brings you comfort. Talk with others in your community about what spiritual support is available.
- ▶ Grief is your own unique experience. Don't let anyone tell you it is time to 'move on' or to 'get over it'. It is okay to feel angry, to cry or not to cry and to find moments of joy.

Over time the intensity of grief changes and interest and engagement in activities of daily living gradually return. For a small number of people grief is prolonged and intense and some professional support is required.

## Supporting the bereaved

After a death we often ask the bereaved person if there is anything we can do to help. We may not know what we can do and may ask the person to tell us what support they need. Many people, however, find it difficult to ask for help or do not know what help they need at this time. It is better for you to take the initiative.

Here are some suggestions that have been found helpful and some to avoid. Choose only the tasks you know you can do and are appropriate to your relationship with the bereaved.

- ▶ Offer practical every day help such as shopping, cooking, cleaning, laundry, driving, looking after children, taking phone calls and offering to contact people. You might suggest you help with funeral arrangements and paperwork, especially if this was the role of the person who died.
- ▶ Grief takes time, so provide ongoing support by staying in touch. Your support is valuable especially when the funeral is over and people have gone. The bereaved person can feel very lonely and isolated.
- ▶ Listen with sympathy. Accept and acknowledge all their feelings. Be willing to sit in silence. Allow them to talk about their loss. Offer comfort and reassurance.
- ▶ Offer extra support on special days. Certain times of year, anniversaries, holidays, and family milestones can be painful for many years.
- ▶ Offer to continue to include the bereaved person in social events and to share enjoyable activities.

- ▶ Avoid making comments such as “I know how you feel”, “It’s part of God’s plan” “They are in a better place now”, “This is behind you now; it’s time to get on with your life”, “You are so strong”.
- ▶ Avoid statements that begin with “You should” or “You will”.
- ▶ Avoid making judgments, giving advice or applying your own beliefs.
- ▶ Use the name of the deceased person. Don’t be afraid that if you talk about them you are going to make things worse.

## Support services

Organisation	Details	Contact
AnglicareWA	Anglicare WA works together with people, families and their communities to enhance their abilities to cope with the challenges of life and relationships.	Phone: 1300 11 44 46 Email: <a href="mailto:info@anglicarewa.org.au">info@anglicarewa.org.au</a> For a full list of metropolitan and country services across WA.
Beyondblue	National not-for-profit organisation that provides information on depression, anxiety and related disorders, available treatments and referrals to relevant services.	Phone: 1300 22 4636. Website: <a href="http://www.beyondblue.org.au">www.beyondblue.org.au</a>
Cancer Support Association of WA	Open grief and loss support group, also provides ongoing group support for carers and those with illness.	Phone: (08) 9384 3544 Website: <a href="http://solariscancercare.org.au">solariscancercare.org.au</a>
Centrecare	Counselling service with fees based on your income.	Phone: (08) 9325 6644 Country centres: South West: Ph (08) 9721 5177 Goldfields: Ph (08) 9080 0333 Esperance Ph (08) 9083 2600 Website: <a href="http://www.centrecare.com.au">www.centrecare.com.au</a>
Compassionate Friends	Self-help group open to bereaved parents, siblings and grandparents. Meetings held in Perth and regional areas.	Phone: (08) 9486 8711 Email: <a href="mailto:info@compassionatefriendswa.org.au">info@compassionatefriendswa.org.au</a> Website: <a href="http://www.compassionatefriendswa.org.au">www.compassionatefriendswa.org.au</a>
Coronial Counselling Service	Free service in cases of a Coronial Inquiry.	Phone: (08) 9425 2900 After hours: 0419 904 476 Country freecall: 1800 671 994 Website: <a href="http://www.coronerscourt.wa.gov.au">www.coronerscourt.wa.gov.au</a>
Crisis Care	Information and referral service.	Phone: (08) 9223 1111 (24 hours) Freecall: 1800 199 008 (24 hours)
DonateLife WA	Free counselling for families of organ donors.	Phone: (08) 9222 0222 Website: <a href="http://donatelife.gov.au">donatelife.gov.au</a>

Organisation	Details	Contact
Lifeline WA	Grief and loss counselling with fees based on income.	Phone: (08) 9261 4444 (ring for appointment) Crisis Line: 13 11 14 (24hr state-wide – free) Website: <a href="http://www.lifelinewa.org.au">www.lifelinewa.org.au</a>
Lionheart	Lionheart provides ongoing programs and events throughout the year to support grieving families.	Opening hours 9am - 4:30 pm every weekday. Phone: 0481 199 758 Website: <a href="http://lionheartcampforkids.com.au">lionheartcampforkids.com.au</a>
Metropolitan Migrant Resource Centre	Grief and loss counselling for individuals and families from Culturally and Linguistically Diverse backgrounds (CALD). Free service.	Phone: (08) 9345 5755 Mon, Wed to Fri 9am to 5pm. Email: <a href="mailto:admin@mmrcwa.org.au">admin@mmrcwa.org.au</a> Website: <a href="http://www.mmrcwa.org.au">www.mmrcwa.org.au</a>
Psychotherapists and Counsellors Association of WA (PACAWA)	Membership directory of private counselling services. Directory lists area of expertise of counsellors. Cost is private fees. Some private health insurance may cover part of the cost.	Website: <a href="http://www.pacawa.asn.au">www.pacawa.asn.au</a>
Palliative Care Australia	If Palliative Care or Hospice were involved in care of the deceased, grief and bereavement support is available for the family and other carers through the service involved.	Phone: 1300 551 704 Email: <a href="mailto:pcwaainc@palliativecare.org.au">pcwaainc@palliativecare.org.au</a> Website: <a href="http://palliativecarewa.asn.au">palliativecarewa.asn.au</a>
Relationships Australia	Grief counselling with fees based on income.	Relationships Australia (WA) has locations throughout WA from Albany up to Port Hedland. To enquire call 1300 364 277 Website: <a href="http://relationshipsaustralia.org.au">relationshipsaustralia.org.au</a>
Silver Chain Grief	Support Services Counselling by appointment. Fees are based on income. Blue Skies is a children's bereavement program run by Silver Chain	Phone: (08) 9242 0242 Country calls: 1300 650 803 Website: <a href="http://www.silverchain.org.au">www.silverchain.org.au</a>
Solace Association	Solace is a not-for-profit volunteer organisation offering support for those whose partner has died. Support is also offered to children.	WA contact: 0488 991 08. Website: <a href="http://www.solace.org.au">www.solace.org.au</a>
Yorgum Aboriginal Counselling Service	Individual or family counselling for Aboriginal people. Free.	Phone: (08) 9218 9477 (Monday to Friday 9.00am – 5.00pm) Website: <a href="http://www.yorgum.com.au">www.yorgum.com.au</a>



## People and organisations to notify

A number of people and organisations need to be notified when someone dies. This helps finalise the person's affairs and can assist you in getting help with practical matters. The following checklist is produced by the Department of Human Services, Centrelink and is available to download along with a sample letter for informing people and organisations of a person's death. Visit the Centrelink webpage:

[www.humanservices.gov.au/customer/subjects/what-to-do-following-a-death](http://www.humanservices.gov.au/customer/subjects/what-to-do-following-a-death)

Person or organisation to be contacted	Contact person, phone number and address (if needed)	Details of person who died (for example, account number, Medicare number)	Notified of death (Yes/No)
Doctor			
Preferred funeral director			
Family and friends			
Executor of will			
Minister of religion			
Funeral bond (Yes/No)			
Prepaid funeral (Yes/No)			
Funeral insurance (Yes/No)			
Centrelink			
Department of Veterans' Affairs			
Foreign pension authority			
Employers			
Superannuation fund			
Clubs (for example, the RSL)			
Banks, credit unions, and other financial institutions			
Public Trustee			
Credit card/hire purchase			
Insurance companies			
Hospital			
Social worker			
Hearing centre			
Health professionals			
- physiotherapist			
- dentist			
- podiatrist			
- optometrist			
Health benefits fund			
Medicare			
Landlord			

Person or organisation to be contacted	Contact person, phone number and address (if needed)	Details of person who died (for example, account number, Medicare number)	Notified of death (Yes/No)
Local electricity authority			
Gas supply company			
Local council (rates/Meals on Wheels)			
Telephone service			
Vehicle registration and licencing authorities			
Electoral Office			
Accountant			
Australian Taxation Office			
Professional bodies (for example, solicitor, accountant)			
Public services (library)			
Post Office			

**It might be easier for you to notify some of these people and organisations in writing. The example letter below shows the type of information you may need to include:**

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

Date of death

I understand the above had dealings with your organisation.

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

Please amend your records.

If you need to contact me for further information,

my name is

and my phone number is

Signature

Name and address

Relationship to the deceased

Date

Kind Regards

## **Compliments and Complaints**

If you wish to express compliments to the staff this may be communicated to the Customer Service Unit and they will then be forwarded to the relevant people. You are of course still able to communicate directly with staff on a particular ward via a card or letter

Patients and their families are encouraged to discuss any issues or concerns with the staff caring for them where possible. If you have any unresolved concerns relating to the care of your loved one, you may contact the Customer Service Unit and speak with the Patient Advocate. The Patient Advocate will listen to your concerns and discuss the options available to help resolve the concerns and obtain answers.

Patient Advocate  
Customer Service Unit  
King Edward Memorial Hospital

Executive Corridor  
1st Floor, A Block  
374 Bagot Road  
Subiaco WA 6008  
Phone: (08) 6458 1444

Email: [wchspatientadvocate@health.wa.gov.au](mailto:wchspatientadvocate@health.wa.gov.au)

Website: [www.wnhs.health.wa.gov.au](http://www.wnhs.health.wa.gov.au)

King Edward Memorial Hospital hopes the information provided in this booklet is useful. The hospital's Grief and Loss Advisory Council welcome feedback on this booklet.

## **Disclaimer**

The advice and information contained herein is provided in good faith as a public service. However the accuracy of any statements made is not guaranteed and it is the responsibility of readers to make their own enquiries as to the accuracy, currency and appropriateness of any information or advice provided. Liability for any act or omission occurring in reliance on this document or for any loss, damage or injury occurring as a consequence of such act or omission is expressly disclaimed.

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This information is available in alternative formats upon request