

A close-up photograph of several crocuses in shades of yellow and purple. The flowers are in various stages of bloom, with some showing bright yellow centers and others showing deep purple petals. The background is softly blurred, creating a shallow depth of field.

What happens when someone dies in hospital



Government
of South Australia

donate life



This booklet will provide information that may be of use to you and your family. It also contains guidance to access support.

Our sincere condolences are extended to you and your family on your recent loss.

The death of a loved one is a very emotional and difficult time. It may have been expected after an illness, or sudden and unexpected.

This booklet will provide you with information that may be of use to you and your family. It also contains guidance to access support in the longer term.

What happens next?

We understand that every individual will be unique in their needs, and recognise that there are many different cultural, spiritual and traditional beliefs and practices that may be relevant at this time.

Viewing and funeral arrangements

Viewing of the person who has died is a very individual decision. It is important to remember that the hospital staff or funeral directors are able to support you with this process. The type of arrangement that can be made will vary on the circumstances of the patient's death and when you are able to attend hospital.

If your loved one has died in a ward area, it may be possible to see them in the ward in which they died. If you are unable to attend soon after the death, or if the patient has died in another area of the hospital (for example, the operating theatre), it may be necessary to make alternative arrangements.

The person who has died will remain at the hospital until you have identified a funeral director and given them permission to transfer the person to the funeral home of your choice.

Many families prefer to arrange for a viewing with their funeral director at the funeral parlour. This enables the funeral director to prepare the deceased and to provide more comfortable surroundings for the bereaved.

Please be assured that every effort will be made to accommodate your wishes as quickly as possible. It may take a little time to arrange to see the deceased in the mortuary viewing room.

Contacting funeral directors

It is important to note that hospital staff cannot recommend funeral directors. The person who has died may have made their own funeral arrangements before they died or made their wishes known to family, a close friend or through their will. Please discuss this decision with your family and loved ones.

For information about suitable funeral homes, talk to friends and family or search the telephone directory or online. The Spiritual Care Service may be able to supply a list of funeral directors. See contact details on [pages 8 and 9](#) of this booklet.

Your funeral director will arrange for release of the deceased from the hospital's mortuary and attend to all the necessary formalities and paperwork, such as the registration of death.

The funeral director will meet with you to discuss your choice of burial, interment or cremation of the person who has died. There is also a choice regarding location and type of service, or another type of ritual according to your needs, cultural, religious, spiritual or traditional customs.

If you are experiencing financial difficulties relating to funeral planning you can contact Funeral Assistance SA on [1300 762 577](#) for advice, or your social worker.

Social work

A social worker is able to assist you with a variety of personal and practical problems if needed, including family issues, grief and loss counselling and links to other agencies and services. If you wish to see a social worker, this can be arranged by informing our staff or calling the relevant social work department. Please see contact list on [pages 8 and 9](#) of this booklet.

Social media

Many people use social media (i.e. Facebook, Twitter, Instagram) to stay in touch with family and friends. It can be difficult to know how to manage these sites after someone dies. While some people choose to avoid all social media immediately after the death of a loved one, others choose to use it as a way to notify people.

There is no right or wrong way to manage these sites. It is important to remember that you are unable to control other people's comments and this may cause you additional distress. You can search the help areas on most social media sites for assistance on how to manage accounts.

Personal items of the deceased

Some items of property belonging to the deceased, such as clothing and toiletries, may be released to the next of kin at the time of death or at a later date by arrangement with our staff. It is important to note that, for legal reasons, valuable items such as money and jewellery, may only be released to the executor of the deceased's estate.

Special circumstances

In special circumstances, we are required by law to notify relevant authorities that a death has occurred. The hospital is also required by law to comply with requests for information relating to a patient's death from police and the State Coroner's Office.

Police

Police will be notified of a patient's death when the cause of death is accidental, unexpected or suspicious. Should this be required, police will contact any relevant party to make the necessary arrangements.

Police may require items of the deceased's property for their investigations. They will be returned to the executor of the deceased estate.

Your rights/entitlements

It is important at this time that you ask the teams around you all of the questions that you need. If you are not comfortable doing this, you may wish to ask someone else to ask on your behalf.

Autopsy/post mortem

An autopsy can provide valuable information about why a person has died. Sometimes things are not clear and an autopsy may be suggested to help define the diagnosis or cause of death for you and your family in the future. Written consent for an elective autopsy is required and will be explained carefully. It is important to note your personal preference and choices.

Organ or tissue donation

Specially trained staff are available to assist you when organ or tissue donation is an option.

If it was possible, it would have been offered if your loved one was in the Intensive Care Unit (ICU). Tissue donation may still be possible and you can ask the clinical team if you would like more information.

Centrelink payments

If you were the primary carer and received a carer's pension, payments will be altered to bereavement payments. You will need to notify Centrelink [132 300](tel:132300) of the death within a fortnight for this to occur. A crisis payment/special benefit may be available in certain circumstances. Telephone [132 850](tel:132850) for advice/assistance as soon as possible.

Certification of death

This will be completed by a doctor, or via the Coroner's Office if referred to the Coroner. The funeral director will register the death at the Department of Births, Deaths and Marriages and a copy of the certificate will be posted to you.

Coronial process

Sometimes the law in South Australia requires that certain circumstances of death be notified to the State Coroner when the cause of death is unknown. For example, if death occurs within 24 hours of certain surgical or invasive medical procedures or your loved one is under the Guardianship of the Minister. In these instances the Coroner will ask the medical team further questions and a formal identification at the place of death must occur. You may be asked to assist with this identification.

If there is reason to progress to a Coroner's investigation/case, then your rights of time and access with your loved one's body may be restricted. At this time you will be guided by the Coroner's representatives and medical team as to what is possible, and will have contact numbers to call if you have any questions throughout the process.

When the Coronial process is complete, the body will be released to a funeral director. Contact details are provided in the *State Coroner's Office Information* brochure, which is available on request or online at www.courts.sa.gov.au/going-to-court/court-locations/coroners-court/the-coronial-process.

Support is available to you during this distressing time. Please do not hesitate to ask for further information, clarification or any other assistance that you feel we may be able to offer.

Support services

If you require assistance in accessing medical or nursing staff for information, or if you have any concerns, please contact the hospital Consumer Advisor team. Individual site details can be found on [pages 8 and 9](#) of this booklet

A wide range of support groups and information is available to assist you through your bereavement and grief. The Social Work department can support you in connecting you with these groups and provide contact details.

What do you need to do?

- > Inform staff if you have any particular personal, religious or cultural requirements
- > Inform staff if you would like to arrange a time to say a personal goodbye
- > Contact a funeral director
- > Arrange for the collection of personal belongings
- > Refer to the contact list on [pages 12 -17](#) for other people and organisations you may need to notify.

Grief and bereavement information

Grief is a natural reaction after the death of someone who has been close to us.

Grief is unique to every individual, and there are many different physical, emotional and psychological responses such as shock, sadness, anger, emptiness, fear, despair, loneliness, guilt, numbness, nausea and depression.

Grief may also include relief, especially if the person had been ill for some time, or if your relationship with them was difficult.

It is not unusual for grief to continue for many months or even years later. The intense grief of the early weeks and months will change over time. Many people find that with support from family and loved ones, they are able to learn to live with the grief and their life grows around it.

If you find that the acute grief does not pass and you feel stuck, specially trained counsellors and psychologists are available to help you. Talk to your GP about requesting a mental health plan and obtaining a referral to a suitable professional.

Hospital telephone numbers

If the service you need to contact is not listed, please phone the relevant hospital switchboard phone number.

Central Adelaide Local Health Network:

Royal Adelaide Hospital

Switchboard enquiries: (08) 7074 0000 (24/7)

Social Work department: (08) 7074 4000

The Queen Elizabeth Hospital

Switchboard enquiries: (08) 8222 6000 (24/7)

Hampstead Rehabilitation Centre

Switchboard enquiries: (08) 8222 1600 (24/7)

Glenside Campus

Phone: (08) 7087 1000

Consumer Experience team

Phone: (08) 7074 1377

Spiritual Care Services

Enquiries (08) 7074 1126

Aboriginal Health and Wellbeing Hub

Enquiries (08) 7074 5460

Northern Adelaide Local Health Network:

Lyell McEwin Hospital

Phone: (08) 8182 9000

Modbury Hospital

Phone: (08) 8161 2000

Consumer Engagement Service

Phone: 1300 013 988

Spiritual Care Services

Enquiries (08) 7074 1126

Aboriginal Liaison Office

Enquiries (08) 8182 9000

Social Work

Contact the primary social worker previously allocated to the patient's case. If this information is not available call the Consumer Advisor.

Southern Adelaide Local Health Network:

Flinders Medical Centre

Phone: (08) 8204 5511

Intensive Critical Care Unit: (08) 8204 4308

Noarlunga Hospital

Switchboard enquiries: (08) 8384 9222

Repat Health Precinct

Switchboard enquiries: (08) 8204 5511

Consumer Advisory Service: (08) 8204 5433

Social Work: (08) 8204 4144

Chaplaincy and Pastoral Care

Phone: (08) 8204 5753

Aboriginal Liaison - Karpa Ngarrattendi

Phone: (08) 8204 6359

Remember, it is okay to ask questions. After you have gone home you can contact the hospital, clinical supports or funeral director any time.

Useful resources

> **Coroner's Office**

(08) 8204 0600

302 King William Street
Adelaide SA 5000

> **The Coroner's booklet**

"*When a Person Dies, The Coronial Process: Information for Family and Friends*" available to download at:

www.courts.sa.gov.au/going-to-court/court-locations/coroners-court/the-coronial-process

> **Beyond Blue**

Enquiries: 1300 224 636

Telephone support is available 24 hours a day, 7 days a week.

> **Road Trauma Support team of SA (RTST)**

Enquiries: 0400 705 006

RTST offers free counselling to individuals and families affected by road trauma.

> **Bereavement Navigation Service**

Enquiries: (08) 8472 8255 or 1 800 725 548 (PALLI8)

Email: bereavement@focusonehealth.com.au

Website: www.focusonehealth.com.au or www.palliativecareconnect.com.au

Information resource for the bereaved and grieving, their carers, friends and colleagues, and for health and welfare workers.

> **Griefline**

Helpline: 1300 845 745

7:30am to 7:30pm: 7 days (ACST)

Website: <https://griefline.org.au/>

In addition to free telephone support, Griefline offers online bereavement support groups and forums, grief resources and information, as well as education and training programs.

> **Grieflink**

Website: www.grieflink.org.au

Information resource for the bereaved and grieving, their carers, friends and colleagues, and for health and welfare workers.

For immediate support

If you feel you are in immediate danger and cannot keep yourself safe, **call 000** or present to your **nearest hospital emergency department**. The following services will also be able to help.

- > Lifeline - [13 11 14](tel:131114). This is a 24 hour emergency telephone service.
- > Assessment and Crisis Intervention Service (ACIS) - [13 14 65](tel:131465).

ACIS is a 24 hour mental health triage service which can link you in to the appropriate mental health services.

The following table lists the people and organisations you may need to contact if someone has died

Person or organisation to be contacted	Notified of death (Yes/No)
Australian Taxation Office	
Banks, credit unions	
Centrelink payments	
Child Support Services	
Clubs <i>(e.g. the Returned and Services League)</i>	
Credit card/hire purchase	
Department of Veterans' Affairs	
Australian Electoral Commission	
Employers	
Executor of the will	
Family and friends	
Foreign pension authority <i>(if authority's details are unknown contact Centrelink's International Services)</i>	
Funeral bond	<input type="checkbox"/> YES <input type="checkbox"/> NO

Contact person, phone number and address <i>(if needed)</i>	Details of person who died <i>(for example, account number, Medicare number)</i>
132 865	
132 300	
131 272	
133 254	
132 326	
131 673	

Person or organisation to be contacted	Notified of death (Yes/No)
Funeral insurance	<input type="checkbox"/> YES <input type="checkbox"/> NO
Health benefits fund	
Health professionals (e.g. doctor, physiotherapist, dentist, podiatrist, optometrist)	
Hearing centre	
Hospital	
Insurance companies	
Landlord, tenants	
Local council	
Medicare services	
Local post office	
Preferred funeral director	
Prepaid funeral	<input type="checkbox"/> YES <input type="checkbox"/> NO
Professional bodies (e.g. solicitor, accountant)	

Person or organisation to be contacted	Notified of death (Yes/No)
Public Services <i>(e.g. library)</i>	
Public Trustee	
Spiritual advisor	
Social Worker	
Superannuation fund	
Telecommunication providers <i>(e.g. phones, internet)</i>	
Utilities <i>(e.g. gas, electricity and phone companies)</i>	
Vehicle registration and licensing authorities	

Contact person, phone number and address <i>(if needed)</i>	Details of person who died <i>(for example, account number, Medicare number)</i>