

Key documents and activities for end-of-life-planning



Overview

A holistic approach to planning includes a diverse range of considerations, only some of which will be the current priorities of an individual or family members. Below is a summary of the key documents and activities that can be considered for planning or revising.

Legal, medical and financial documents

Relevant prior to death	Relevant upon and/or after death
Advanced care directives	Will/Will and testament
Enduring guardianship nominations	Statement of wishes/Living will
Refusal of medical treatment certificate	Funeral payment plans, pre-paid cemetery or body disposal documents
Private health cover and insurance	Life insurance policy
Voluntary assisted dying request	Donation documents – organ, tissue, body
	Superannuation death benefit nomination

Areas that can be a part of holistic end-of-life planning

For many individuals the following areas of activity are likely to be considered relevant only when prompted by external factors. Such as when a person's age, frailty, or diagnosis of terminal or degenerative disease indicates a limited time before death, or incapacity. However, no-one is promised tomorrow we'll never know when we may abruptly become unable to make or act on decisions affecting us. The following activities can be planned for and undertaken at any time. Indeed, it will probably be an easier and more positive process if it's done before you really need to.

Whilst this list contains nine areas of activity, in reality all the actions and activities are related: everything is connected with everything else, in death as in life.

Preparing medical documents

- A range of documents exist to record your wishes about medical care if you're unable to be involved in the decision making, or to clearly delegate the decision-making power to another person or people.
- These documents should be reviewed and revised on a regular basis or if health, family circumstances or priorities change.

Preparing legal documents and financial arrangements

- Significant legal documents include a Will (legally binding) and a Statement of wishes.
- Some financial arrangements are often part of a Will, and others are more commonly separate documents e.g. life insurance cover, pre-paid funerals, or more complicated provisions such as trusts.

Understanding death and dying

- Understanding the process of dying and death is potentially useful for an individual or loved ones to prepare for a death.
- It can also help others provide better support to the dying person including undertaking practical and medical processes and making decisions.

Physical housekeeping

- Considering whether current living arrangements and property ownership would be suitable in light of frailty, or diagnosis of degenerative or terminal illnesses, and managing the impacts including planning options for different future living arrangements.
- Beginning the process of organising, reducing or donating physical possessions to ensure that items of value and utility are identified, and gifts of importance reach the intended people.

Emotional housekeeping

- Age or diagnosis of terminal or degenerative illness can be an important prompt to reach out to family and friends, express gratitude, make amends or speak unspoken truths.
- Individuals may focus their remaining time and energy on the activities of most importance to them such as supporting their loved ones or living as fully and authentically as they can.

Religious, cultural and ritual activities

- All cultures and religions have particular approaches to dying, death and grieving. These activities help the family, community and individual at a psychological and spiritual level to manage the practicalities and make sense of the end-of-life processes.
- Incorporate rites and rituals – whether traditional, tailored or created – to reflect the beliefs, values and wishes of the individual and their loved ones.

Celebration and commemoration

- A funeral and wake are the most recognised and common activity used both to commemorate and celebrate the life of the person and support a gathering of people to reminisce and connect. There is increasing diversity in funeral service providers, and their costs and ability to provide very traditional or highly personalised services.
- Celebrating the life of a loved one, can occur both after death or before, through a living wake. Family or community-led commemorations are limitless in the ability to reflect the life of the loved one and can include, or be organised by, the dying person.

Body disposal, disposition

- Cremation and cemetery burial are the most popular ways of disposing of the body in Australia - both of which can include many variations. There are also new and emerging approaches including both technological developments and pre-industrial approaches.
- Accessibility, cost and environmental impact, as well as the values of the individual are important factors.
- Donating the body to medical or scientific research is also possible in limited circumstances.

Memoriam or legacy

- A memoriam or legacy can encompass a diverse range of activities from leaving bequests or trusts that support individuals or causes over the long term to determining the type of gravestone and epitaph. It could also be how an online or digital presence is managed or gifting a bench and plaque along a favourite walking track or lizard lounge in a local park.