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| After death occurs |
| Information for people considering voluntary assisted dying |

# Introduction

This factsheet provides information for carers, family, friends and support persons about what to expect after a person has accessed voluntary assisted dying. The information in this factsheet is also available as part of the comprehensive guide [*Voluntary assisted dying – Information for people considering voluntary assisted dying*](https://www2.health.vic.gov.au/hospitals-and-health-services/patient-care/end-of-life-care/voluntary-assisted-dying/community-consumer-information)<https://www2.health.vic.gov.au/hospitals-and-health-services/patient-care/end-of-life-care/voluntary-assisted-dying/community-consumer-information>.

Different people have different preferences for how much they want to know about death and dying. There is no right or wrong way to deal with this difficult time. Your family and friends’ responses will be shaped by their beliefs, values, culture, experiences and circumstances.

The following information may be helpful if your carer, family, friend or support person wants to know what to expect after your death. It includes practical information about what to do immediately after your death, as well as support services they can contact to help them through their grief.

# What to do first

## Death at home

Different people approach the death of a family member or friend at home in different ways. Some may want to sit with the person for a while; others may prefer to make arrangements immediately. For more information about the dying process visit the [Better Health Channel](https://www.betterhealth.vic.gov.au/health/servicesandsupport/At-the-end-dying-explained)<https://www.betterhealth.vic.gov.au/health/servicesandsupport/At-the-end-dying-explained> and for palliative care resources visit [Palliative Care Australia](https://palliativecare.org.au/resources) <https://palliativecare.org.au/resources>.

After your death your carer, family, friend or support person will, when ready, notify your palliative care service (if one has been involved in your care) or your doctor, or can directly contact the funeral director of your choice. A doctor or nurse does not need to visit your home to verify the death, although if you have been receiving palliative care, usually a nurse from the service will visit to support your carer, family, friend or support person.

Any doctor can fill out the Medical Certificate of Cause of Death as long as they know your medical history and are prepared to certify the cause and manner of your death. The Medical Certificate Cause of Death must be completed within 48 hours of death. The doctor will also notify the Registrar of Births, Deaths and Marriages.

For more information about what to do after a person has died visit the [Better Health Channel](https://www.betterhealth.vic.gov.au/health/servicesandsupport/what-to-do-after-someone-dies)<https://www.betterhealth.vic.gov.au/health/servicesandsupport/what-to-do-after-someone-dies>.

## Death in a hospital or care facility

If death happens in a hospital or care facility, the staff can help and support your family members through the process.

# Notification to the Coroner

The doctor who certifies the death must also notify the Coroner. In most cases, the Coroner will not need to investigate the death.

# Returning any unused medication

If you were planning to self-administer the medication your contact person will need to return any unused voluntary assisted dying medication to the Voluntary Assisted Dying Statewide Pharmacy Service within 15 days of your death. The Voluntary Assisted Dying Review Board will follow up with your contact person after your death to check they have returned the medication to the Voluntary Assisted Dying Statewide Pharmacy Service.

If your coordinating doctor was going to administer the medication to you, the contact person will not have a role in returning any unused medication after death (as the doctor will do this). However, the Voluntary Assisted Dying Review Board will still contact them to check how the process went.

# Death certificate

For people who access voluntary assisted dying, the Register of Births, Deaths and Marriages will record both the cause and manner of death. The cause of death will be the underlying disease (for example, cancer, motor neurone disease). The manner of death will be recorded as ‘voluntary assisted dying’. The extract from the Register (commonly called the death certificate) that your family receives will not say that you accessed voluntary assisted dying. It will only record your underlying disease.

# Bereavement support for carers, family and friends

After death, family members and friends may experience a range of emotions such as sadness, anger, relief, disbelief, anxiety or numbness. Supporting each other is important in helping people who have experienced bereavement. Grief can be very painful, but most people can gradually find ways to live with their loss.

There are several community organisations that offer support and counselling services to help with managing grief. For example, the [Australian Centre for Grief and Bereavement](https://www.grief.org.au/) <https://www.grief.org.au/> offers face-to-face counselling and support groups for people experiencing grief. They also offer telephone counselling for people in remote areas of Victoria. They can be contacted on 1800 642 066.

Your doctor or a voluntary assisted dying care navigator can also help your carer, family, friends or support person link with the right supports, including counselling services. [Email the voluntary assisted dying care navigator at Peter Mac](mailto:vadcarenavigator@petermac.org) <vadcarenavigator@petermac.org>.

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