

Planning the funeral

You can contact a funeral director at any time. The funeral director will help you plan the funeral and will liaise with you and CA&E staff.

The funeral director can arrange to have your loved one transferred to regional Victoria if needed.

Getting a death certificate

Death certificates are issued by the Registry of Births, Deaths and Marriages Victoria (BDM). There is a fee for death certificates, which may be included as part of the funeral costs.

In most cases, you won't need to apply directly for a death certificate - the funeral director will usually do it for you.

BDM will issue the death certificate to the person who the funeral director listed as the informant. If you were not the one making the funeral arrangements, you may be eligible to apply directly to BDM for a copy of the death certificate.

BDM offers different types of certificates depending on your needs and whether the coroner has determined cause of death.

Death Certificate – without cause of death

This legal certificate does not include sensitive information about your loved one, such as the cause of death, burial information, or registration date. This certificate can be issued if the coroner has not yet established the cause of death and it can be used with organisations which do not require you to provide the cause of your loved one's death. It is always best to check with the organisation you are dealing with to see if they will accept the death certificate.

Death certificate – with cause of death

This legal certificate includes all details about your loved one, including sensitive information such as the cause of death, burial information, and registration date. This certificate can be provided to any organisation that asks you to prove the death of your loved one has occurred.

Note: the coroner must have determined cause of death before BDM can issue this certificate.

Interim death certificate

Interim death certificates are used if you need to repatriate your loved one to their own country. This can be issued if the coroner has not yet established the cause of death.

Helpful contacts

If you have any questions about the initial stages of a coronial investigation, you can contact CA&E on 1300 309 519 (24 hours) or visit the Court's website www.coronerscourt.vic.gov.au.

Additional support services that may help during this difficult time are listed below. The numbers are available during business hours, unless otherwise stated.

- **Court Network (Court Process Support)** 1800 681 614
- **Donor Tissue Bank of Victoria** (03) 9684 4444
- **Federation of Community Legal Centres Victoria** (03) 9652 1500
- **Grief Australia** (03) 9265 2100
- **GriefLine** 1300 845 745 (8am to 8pm: Mon-Fri)
- **Hope Bereavement Care (Geelong region)** (03) 4215 3358
- **Interpreter Service** 13 14 50
- **Lifeline** 13 11 14 (24 hours)
- **Mercy Grief Services (Western Metropolitan Region only)** (03) 9313 5700
- **National Relay Service TTY** 13 36 77 (for hearing impaired) 1300 555 727 (speak and listen)
- **Registry of Births, Deaths and Marriages Victoria** 1300 369 367
- **Road Trauma Support Services** 1300 367 797
- **Red Nose (formerly SIDS and Kids)** 1300 308 307 (24 hours)
- **State Trustees** (03) 9667 6444, 1300 138 672 (country areas)
- **SuicideLine Victoria** 1300 651 251 (24 hours)
- **Support After Suicide** 1800 943 415
- **StandBy - Support After Suicide** 1300 727 247
- **The Compassionate Friends Victoria** (03) 9888 4944, 1300 064 068 (24 hours)
- **Victims of Crime Helpline** 1800 819 817
- **Victoria Legal Aid** 1300 792 387
- **Victorian Aboriginal Legal Services** 1800 064 865



Coroners Court
of Victoria

— What
happens
now? —

First steps in the coronial process

This brochure explains the things you need to know immediately after the death of a loved one is reported to the coroner, including the help that is available and what the coroner will do in the initial stages of the coronial process.

Coroners Court of Victoria
65 Kavanagh Street,
Southbank VIC 3006
T: 1300 309 519
W: coronerscourt.vic.gov.au

Help in a difficult time

Staff from the Coroners Court of Victoria (the Court) and Coronial Admissions and Enquiries (CA&E) can give you information and referrals for services that may help with your grief and loss. The back page of this brochure has a list of helpful contacts for a range of support services that may be useful during this difficult time.

Role of the coroner



The coroner must find, if possible:

1. the identity of the person who has died
2. the cause of the death
3. in some cases, the circumstances surrounding the death.

Coroners do not investigate all deaths, only deaths that are “reportable”. Reportable deaths include:

- those that are unexpected, unnatural or violent, or caused by an accident or injury
- those that happen unexpectedly during or after a medical procedure
- those that happen when the person who died was in custody or care
- when a doctor is not able to sign a death certificate
- when the identity of the person is not known.

First contacts

Police attend the place of all deaths reported to the coroner, except some deaths that have occurred in a hospital. This is because the police need to complete a Report of Death for the coroner. The presence of the police at the scene does not necessarily mean they believe someone was involved with the death. They may also speak to the family shortly afterwards to get more information. It is part of the normal coronial process for all deaths reported to the coroner.

CA&E staff will get in touch with you about the first steps of the coronial process.

CA&E is a state-wide, 24-hour service provided by the Victorian Institute of Forensic Medicine.

The role of CA&E is to:

- receive reports of deaths
- take a person’s body into the care of CA&E
- coordinate identifying the person who has died
- coordinate the medical investigation into a death for the coroner
- release a person’s body for the funeral.

Admission into care

In most cases, if your loved one died in Melbourne, they will be taken into the care of CA&E at the Coronial Services Centre, 65 Kavanagh Street, Southbank. If your loved one died in regional Victoria, CA&E staff will get in touch with you and tell you where they are being cared for.

CA&E staff will help if you want to see or spend time with your loved one and will talk to you about who will be the senior next of kin. Any communication about the coronial investigation will be made through that person or their chosen representative.

Senior next of kin

The senior next of kin is usually the person’s spouse or domestic partner. If the person does not have a partner, or they are not available, then the senior next of kin will be (in this order):

- an adult son or daughter (18 years and over)
- a parent
- an adult brother or sister (18 years and over)
- a person named in the will as an executor
- a person who, just before the death, was a personal representative of the person who has died
- a person that the coroner decides to be the senior next of kin because of their close relationship with the person who has died just before their death.

Identification

The coroner needs to confirm the identity of the person who has died. This can include visual or medical and scientific identification methods.

If visual identification is needed, you may be asked to come to the Coronial Services Centre to identify your loved one. To identify a loved one, you must be a family member or someone who knew the person well at the time of their death. CA&E staff will schedule a viewing appointment for you during office hours.

Medical or scientific methods of identification include using dental records, fingerprinting or DNA comparisons. The coroner will decide the most appropriate method of identification and CA&E staff will let you know the process that will be used.

Medical examinations

Medical examinations are carried out to help the coroner work out the cause of a person’s death. Even if it seems obvious, it is very important that the coroner is able to find out exactly what happened.

Preliminary examination

Once your loved one is in the care of CA&E, a forensic pathologist will examine them. This preliminary examination is minimally invasive. CA&E staff work closely with the forensic pathologist and can answer any questions you have.

CA&E staff may ask you for help to get your loved one’s medical records or other information. They may also need to talk to you about the circumstances surrounding the death. The police may also contact you to discuss the death. This helps the coroner to gather as many facts surrounding the death as possible.

Autopsy

In some cases, the forensic pathologist will need to perform an autopsy. This is a medical procedure that aims to work out the medical cause of death. If a coroner believes that an autopsy is needed, CA&E staff will first contact the senior next of kin to explain the process and answer any questions.

If you want to object to an autopsy being performed – for example, because of religious or cultural reasons – please let CA&E staff know so that they can let the coroner know. The coroner will take your concerns into account and CA&E staff will contact you again to let you know the coroner’s decision.

Personal possessions

The police generally keep personal possessions, such as jewellery, clothing and other valuables, found at the place of death and then give them to the funeral director. Occasionally, the police may keep some items for forensic examination.

Otherwise, all personal items are given to the funeral director to be returned to the family. If you have questions about personal possessions, please let CA&E staff know.