



HOME BASED DEATH CARE

Home based death care is a model of after death care whereby family and friends of the deceased provide care instead of, or with minimal assistance from, professional funeral directors. Often, this will take place in the family home but can be in any home style setting that is chosen such as an aged care setting or in hospice. Home based death care provides families and friends the opportunity to care for their person in death as they may very well have done in life.

After the death of your person, if that death has not been at home, you can choose for them to be taken to your home or that of another friend or relative - a dead person does not need to go to a funeral home unless that is the preferred choice. Once your person is home, you are able to take whatever time you need to spend time with them, and to provide the after death care for your person you decide on. Common practices include: washing and dressing, shrouding, building a coffin, decorating a shroud, and holding ritual and ceremony.

If you are in a private home, you can keep your person with you there for several days without the intervention of embalming. The time frame around how long your person can remain with you varies across different States and Territories but general consensus in the home funeral movement suggests that depending on the manner of death, 3-5 days is a reasonable time to keep a body at home without any outward signs of decomposition being present.

Cooling needs to be in place within the first eight hours or so, and when caring for your person at home, best practice suggests that maintaining the body at 5 degrees Celsius is ideal. This is possible in a home setting through use of a cooling plate or blanket, a Cuddle Cot® for a child, ice packs, dry ice, or Techni Ice in conjunction with portable air conditioners where necessary to assist in keeping the room temperature cool. Some or all of these options are available to Australians, depending on what is on offer in your local area. If the cool temperature is achieved and maintained then you are not required to place the care of your person into the hands of a mortuary or into commercial refrigeration.

Sometimes, a family may want to spend time with their person for a few hours, a day or longer but not to conduct the logistical and administrative functions required or indeed, the hands-on care of their loved one. All of this is possible with the assistance of a home funeral practitioner such as a holistic funeral director or a home funeral practitioner (some end of life doulas offer this service). It is important to note that



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families and communities can be involved in all of these processes to the extent that they feel comfortable - for some people a little involvement is enough, others want to do it all.

If a family has decided to engage a funeral director, a good option for families can be that they hold vigil with their person at the funeral home - in most cases funeral homes provide space for vigils to happen, and funeral home staff can facilitate the family in giving after death care to their person in the funeral home setting. In these cases the timing can be more restricted when compared to after death care in a private residence, however a funeral home can be the right choice for some families.

While it is not a legal requirement to use a funeral director when your person dies, in some States and Territories funeral directors are required for some functions (such as transport or organising a cremation), and funeral home staff can be a good source of support for families who would like to do all or some of the home based death care themselves. It is always advisable to talk with a funeral director prior to engaging their services, to talk through your values, thoughts and wishes so that you know what is and is not achievable, what each funeral home is able to accommodate for you and what you can expect when the time comes to engage them. Ask for full pricing up front.

For home funerals NDAN members have a wide range of skills and experience among our member base if you have questions or would like support.