

The Last Hurrah Funerals

DIY Funeral Workshop: A guide



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The First rule of thumb

There's NO law against it!

The Second rule of thumb

What am I capable of at a time like this? (You may need to battle hard to achieve a totally DIY funeral)

LEGISLATION LINKS

The most relevant info related to coffins/receptacles and transporting your person is in these regulations

The cemeteries and crematoria Regulations of 2015:

[http://www.legislation.vic.gov.au/Domino/Web_Notes/LDMS/PubStatbook.nsf/93eb987ebadd283dca256e92000e4069/AF4BB5E2F4B3A663CA257EDD000B8673/\\$FILE/15-115sra%20authorised.pdf](http://www.legislation.vic.gov.au/Domino/Web_Notes/LDMS/PubStatbook.nsf/93eb987ebadd283dca256e92000e4069/AF4BB5E2F4B3A663CA257EDD000B8673/$FILE/15-115sra%20authorised.pdf)

The Funerals Act 2006 is good to get your head around your rights as a consumer:

[http://www.legislation.vic.gov.au/Domino/Web_Notes/LDMS/PubStatbook.nsf/f932b66241ecf1b7ca256e92000e23be/6B12040E7A2BE08ACA2572030021F481/\\$FILE/06-077a.pdf](http://www.legislation.vic.gov.au/Domino/Web_Notes/LDMS/PubStatbook.nsf/f932b66241ecf1b7ca256e92000e23be/6B12040E7A2BE08ACA2572030021F481/$FILE/06-077a.pdf)

The Cemeteries and Crematoria act 2003 is very long and boring. Knock yourself out:

[http://www.legislation.vic.gov.au/domino/Web_Notes/LDMS/LTObject_Store/ltobjst9.nsf/DDE300B846EED9C7CA257616000A3571/D0F92091DC359377CA258002000459FA/\\$FILE/03-80aa030%20authorised.pdf](http://www.legislation.vic.gov.au/domino/Web_Notes/LDMS/LTObject_Store/ltobjst9.nsf/DDE300B846EED9C7CA257616000A3571/D0F92091DC359377CA258002000459FA/$FILE/03-80aa030%20authorised.pdf)

The Coroners Act 2008 is all about why and how the coroners takes on the cases it does. Not as interesting as you'd hope when you get into it!

http://www.legislation.vic.gov.au/domino/Web_Notes/LDMS/LTObject_Store/ltobjst9.nsf/DDE300B846EED9C7CA257616000A3571/7682F2C41F8FFABACA257EB300145574/%24FILE/08-77aa024%20authorised.pdf

DIY DEATHCARE – STEP BY STEP



Photo by Soul Passages

We found this amazing series on DIY Deathcare at the Canadian Integrative Network for Death Education and Alternatives, which covers most steps of caring for someone at home:

<http://www.cindea.ca/home-funerals.html#videos>

STEP 1: TRANSFERRING YOUR PERSON HOME

To do it yourself consider the how, where and who. You'll need a vehicle long and wide enough to safely accommodate the person. There is a chance the person may have some leakage, so you'll need to have a body bag or other plastic or absorbent material to wrap them in. You will also want to consider their dignity, so have a nice cloth cover that you can drape over them, and which covers them entirely.

See our detailed tips below on how to safely move a deceased person.

Finally, you'll need enough people to assist.

Alternatively, you can contact us to help with a transfer to home, or to a mortuary. We're available 24/7 by calling Kimba on 0430378388.

CORONERS' OFFICE

The most difficult place would be the coroner's but there is NO LAW AGAINST it, and we've heard from someone who works in the coroner's mortuary that is absolutely possible, so if you want to do this, go for it! It is confronting and unpleasant, and you'll likely be in a deep state of shock, so weigh those things up.

A funeral director or the transport company can also do this for you, or the transport company listed above

HOSPITAL

Far easier in terms of set up, but they may not be used to it. Actually, you can almost count on them not being used to it. To book in a collection, ask for the 'anatomical pathology department', and get ready to push your case.

NURSING HOME

Probably the easiest as they don't have any storage facilities. Go hard and take your person home!

PRACTICAL TIPS TO MOVE A DEAD PERSON

- A body bag is the best way to protect your vehicle and retain a person's dignity when moving them. If a death is expected you could purchase these yourself online or from a transfer company. You could also wrap the person in sheets and towels
- It's a good idea to put an adult nappy on the person, to secure their head with rolled up towels and to pop a towel to the side of their head in case of purge
- Don't count on a facility letting you use their trolleys. A piece of MDF a little longer and wider than the person would work, but consider the length when placing in your car
- A sheet is a useful tool to slide and move a dead person
- For information about how to roll and move a dead person, see this video: <https://youtu.be/lsEJiYoOe1Y>
- You can affix the person to the board with some soft rope or long cloths
- Ensure you have enough people to safely carry your person
- Consider how you will get the person inside your house; tight corners and stairs can be very difficult!

CONSIDERATIONS FOR MOVING A DEAD PERSON HOME

- How did the person die? If they were at the coroners, then most likely an autopsy was conducted. This affects the integrity of your person's body and makes them more likely to leak or purge
- Some cancers and medications such as opiates can rapidly speed up the decomposition process. A body can completely change or degrade in a matter of hours. If you are uncertain, it may be better to engage an independent mortuary expert to assess your person
- How will you maintain your person's privacy and dignity? Blankets, sheets and other coverings can help greatly

STEP 2: CARE AND PREPERATION OF YOUR PERSONS BODY



Photo by Lyra Butler Denman

If you want professional help and assistance to care for your person, including whatever mortuary care may be necessary to ensure the best possible experience for a home vigil, extended period of lying in state, letting children be with a loved one, or after an accident or other incident that has transformed someone's body in a traumatic way, you might consider engaging an independent mortuary expert yourself.

Tara Mackay is a trade embalmer, compassionate mortuary expert and highly experienced funeral professional who works with families, listens deeply, and can transform the experience of saying goodbye and spending time with the deceased. This can be as simple as helping you wash and dress, possibly closing the eyes and mouth, or more technical procedures if your person's body shows that's necessary.

Tara Mackay: taramackay@icloud.com

We partner with Tara to assist families to have the best. possible experience in caring for their person. We can assist with transfers, home care, or whatever other aspects you feel you need assistance with.

DIY CARE AT HOME

This is possible and can be extremely healing and special. A funeral director, death doula, or mortuary professional can also assist you through the experience if you'd like that.

The Natural Deathcare centre in Byron has put together this incredible resource on care at home:

<http://www.naturaldeathcarecentre.org/wp-content/uploads/2014/06/7.-Practical-Care-of-the-Body.pdf>

WHERE TO PLACE YOUR PERSON

- A massage table is useful as the height makes it easy to wash and prepare the person and also to have them lie in state. If you add a piece of MDF or other board that is a bit wider than the table, this will give you even more ease of access
- Some people prefer to move their person to a bed after washing and preparing them, so people can lie down and get close to them.
- A room that can be sheltered from direct sunlight, and that has aircon is ideal.

COLLING THE BODY

- You can hire cooling beds, either through a funeral director or via a death doula. The end of life doula directory lists Melbourne doulas that can hire a bed: <https://www.endoflifedouladirectory.com.au/cooling-beds-home-death-care/#>

(We are able to quickly source a bed for you, and pick up, deliver and install it for you. Just ask us!)

- Dry Ice is also an excellent way to cool your person if you can't get hold of a cooling bed. This link has great information: <https://peacefulpassageathome.com/cooling-the-body.html>
- In Melbourne check out www.havingaparty.com.au for dry ice supplies
- Be realistic about the time of year you're in. Also, with babies, they need to spend enough time on the cool mat or in the cuddle cot to stay cool. This is important.

BODY PREPERATION

- Dead bodies are in a constant state of change, and this change is dynamic and constant. If you want to have your person home, you'll need to come to terms with this.
- Bodies can leak from any orifice, purge from the mouth or genitals, they will become hard and rigid, and then soften again. Blood will pool in the lower side of the body and extremities, and cause discolouration over time

- The PDF from The Natural Deathcare centre is truly a great resource, as is the CINDEA website. Here are links to videos on washing and dressing: <http://www.cindea.ca/home-funerals.html#videos>
- Self-care is extremely important as it is difficult to move a dead person; care for your back by having at least two people, use a sheet to make things easier and use the anchor points of their shoulder and hip to safely roll and move the person.
- The basic elements beyond washing and dressing include being prepared to deal with purge from the person's mouth, and considering how you want to manage the person's appearance, such as closing their eyes and mouth
- To close their eyes, you can put a little cotton wool under the lid, or use a dollop of paw paw or Vaseline under the lid
- To close their mouth, you can use a rolled-up towel or face washer, prop their head on a pillow to adjust the angle, or use a scarf to tie under the jaw and up to the top of the head. If you can do this before rigor mortis it will set the mouth; otherwise it may be more difficult to maintain a closed mouth
- Beyond this, the ritual of this process is entirely up to you, and it is where the magic happens
- To get more info on dressing a body here are some links:

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=cr86ncB-qww>

<https://youtu.be/c0qCmrUWcCc>

CONSIDERATIONS

- If the person had a lot of opiates in their system, died of a heart attack or drowning or certain cancers, there is a higher chance that person may decompose more rapidly, or be affected by tissue gas, caused by a bacteria that can rapidly change a body. You might take someone home and then decide that perhaps you need extra help. Funeral directors like us or independent mortuary experts are happy to help, but it can be stressful for all to come in new to a situation like this. Having someone on hand to assist you with your person could be useful
- Sometimes a person may bloat or have a lot of gas building up. In this case, mortuary care can assist to fix this problem, and this will mean you can have your vigil longer, with less issues

- You can take your person home right away, or you could choose to have a mortuary specialist do the basic preparations required to have the safest and most predictable time possible with your person. Predictable in this scenario is the ideal scenario.
- If your person had a pacemaker and you want to cremate them, it must be removed.

STEP 3: COFFINS, CASKETS AND SHROUDS



There are so many options, and it's hard to know even where to begin! You can buy coffins direct from some places such as Costco and coffin world, and smaller handmade and artisan crafters but other manufacturers are weird and awkward and make you go through a funeral director. If this happens, we can help...

THE REGULATIONS

For Burial:

A person must not bring bodily remains or body parts to be interred into a public cemetery, or convey those bodily remains or body parts within a public cemetery, unless the bodily remains or body parts are enclosed in a coffin, container or receptacle— (a) that is clean and hygienic; and (b) that is constructed of wood, metal or other substantial material; and (c) from which neither offensive or noxious emissions nor matter from those bodily remains or body parts will escape

Cremation:

A person must not bring bodily remains or body parts to be cremated into a public cemetery, or convey those bodily remains or body parts within a public cemetery, unless those bodily remains or body parts are enclosed in a coffin, container or receptacle— (a) with a flat base; and (b) that is clean and hygienic; and (c) that is constructed of wood, or other substantial material that is combustible and that will not— (i) impede the cremation process; or (ii) cause damage to the cremator; and (d) that will not give rise to noxious emissions when burnt; and (e) from which neither offensive or noxious emissions nor matter from the bodily remains or body parts will escape.

- The key elements above are a flat base and not impeding the cremation process. For Cardboard coffins that can be a point of contention with Crematories. If you want to use a cardboard coffin, SMCT (Springvale and Bunurong) are happy to accept them.
- All coffins need a removable nameplate of some kind for the crematory. You can use stiff cardboard and handwrite the name to save money and resources.

ENVIRONMENTAL CONCERNS

They all have issues, it's difficult to be fully environmentally friendly. The most environmentally friendly body cover is a shroud!

CARDBOARD COFFINS

- Can be cheap, but can be made with formaldehyde-based glues
- Cardboard takes a lot of water to produce, some crematoriums have issues with the cardboard if they don't think the base is flat or solid enough. It's best to confirm directly and be prepared to bring a solid MDF or particleboard base of the same dimensions of the coffin just in case.

- They can also burn up so quickly the crematoriums operator needs to use extra fuel to finish the job.

It seems both cardboard coffin suppliers we know of like you to go through a funeral director, as they don't sell individual units.

PINE COFFINS

If you can get plantation pine, that uses beeswax glue and saw dust and calico linings, that's a pretty good option. We know a place that does these if you need help sourcing.

WOOL, WICKER AND NATURAL FIBERS

there are plenty of options, and many will sell direct to the public.

BUILD YOUR OWN COFFIN

The short answer is you can, but the crem or cemetery may ask you to prove that the receptacle is safe, meets Australian standards and won't impede their equipment. What are the Australian standards? I couldn't find them!

Basically, it needs to be strong enough that the person will not fall through, have a flat base, be combustible if you are planning to cremate it, be lined in a way that will prevent leakages (saw dust, fabric, plastic), and it should have handles especially if you plan to have a burial.

You also need to consider the dimensions of the coffin, to ensure it will fit in the burial plot or cremator. Here are some standard dimensions you can work from:

Medium Ext 185 x 51 x 36cm Int 178 x 46 x 29cm
Large Ext 198 x 60 x 40cm Int 189 x 53 x 29cm

If booking a country cemetery, be sure to add a few inches each side to accommodate handles and lowering tapes.

DIY Coffin kits

<https://casketkit.com/>

<http://www.chistann.com/>

<https://www.designboom.com/art/diy-ikea-coffin-by-joe-scanlan/>

SHROUDS

It is possible to shroud someone and cremate or bury them in that shroud in Victoria. It becomes a little more difficult when it gets to the disposition, as you cannot enter a cemetery without a body being placed in a receptacle of some kind. There are workarounds though, so read on.

To make your own shrouds, again CINDEA is an amazing resource, with PDFs for both unsewn and sewn shrouds:

www.cindea.ca/shrouds.html

We can also provide you with shrouds sourced from the Islamic community, which are ready to use. The cost is \$150.

If you have time and resources, there are beautiful handmade and personalised shrouds available from artisanal makers:

Shroud Memento: www.funeralshrouds.com.au

Finding Solace: www.findingsolace.com.au

SHROUDED DISPOSITION

CREMATION

All three major cemetery trusts, who have their own crematoriums (GMCT, SMCT, Geelong) allow shrouded cremations, but they require the body to be placed on a shroud bearer. Essentially this is like a tray with 100-millimetre sides, that the body can be placed onto before cremation. They also require the body to be enclosed in a container to enter the cemetery grounds, which is a bit annoying if you want to keep resources and costs down and just have a shroud cremation!

Funeral directors like us can rent you a lined coffin to use for this trip to the cemetery, or you could create your own 'lid', seeing as it is just to cover your person for the trip in. We are also developing an enclosed fabric pod to use as a shroud that doesn't need a lid or bearer.

SHROUD BEARERS

For cremation, a bearer is a must. They can be beautiful and expensive to buy, or you can make your own. Ensure it has a flat, solid base and 100mm sides. We also offer these for free with our basic packages, or can sell you a sustainable timber bearer at a reasonable price.

Here are some examples for inspiration:



SHROUD BURIAL

Is also allowed, but cemetery trusts often say there is no precedent for it outside Muslim and Jewish communities. However, there is NO law against it, and provided you are well prepared with the right equipment, and knowledge of how to safely lower a body into the ground, they cannot legally refuse.

If you aren't familiar with the lowering mechanisms or machines, you may want a funeral director to assist you with this part of the day.

As well as needing to cover the body for entry into a cemetery, you also need to consider how you will lower the body into the grave. Here is an image and some instructions on building your own burial board (courtesy of www.usurnsonline.com)



You can make your own carrying board. Here's how:

- Cut a sturdy 1/2" board between 22" and 36" wide
- Make the length about 12-18" longer than the individual's height
- Cut holes in at least 1" from the sides for handles
- Stain the board if you wish, but most eco-friendly cemeteries require untreated/unfinished wood
- You'll want six handles, two holes per handle set about 4-6" apart from each other
- Tie the end of a thick, sturdy rope in a figure 8 knot, then run it upwards through the hole so that the knot stops against the bottom of the board
- Set your handle length at about 12", then cut and tie off the other end after passing it through the nearby hole
- Repeat for each of the 6 handles

ENCOFFINING

Following the instructions for moving a person outlined above, you can certainly encoffin your own person. Be sure to have enough people, place the coffin lower than the surface they are laying on to help with safe movement, and be aware that these kinds of movements can cause the body to leak or purge, so cover up nice clothing with towels before moving

STEP 4: FILLING OUT THE PAPERWORK

This is a deceptively tricky task; there is a fair amount of paperwork, and it must be done correctly, or they will send you home, even if you are at the crematorium with your person.

The paperwork varies for different types of deaths, and whether you choose burial or cremation

For **cremation** there are generally three documents you need:

1. Application for Cremation Authorisation
<https://www2.health.vic.gov.au/about/publications/formsandtemplates/form-3-application-for-cremation-authorisation>
2. A medical certificate of cause of death by the attending doctor at the time of death OR Coroner's order (you only need one of these: they will provide this to you when you pick up the body, or in some cases soon after)
3. Cremation Authorisation (this needs to be signed by a second doctor who has viewed the body:
<https://www2.health.vic.gov.au/about/publications/formsandtemplates/form-4-certificate-of-registered-medical-practitioner-authorising-cremation>

BURIAL

For burial you need the same medical certificate or coroner's release, but you don't need a second doctor to view the body.

You also need these forms completed:

Application for right of Interment

<https://www2.health.vic.gov.au/about/publications/formsandtemplates/application-for-right-of-interment>

Authorisation of Interment

<https://www2.health.vic.gov.au/about/publications/FormsAndTemplates/form-1-application-for-interment-authorisation>

BABIES

Stillborn babes have a different form, but don't need a second doctor if they have a notice of stillbirth and a Coroners certificate. The attending doctor provides, and then you need the same forms as above.

Babes less than 28 days require a second doctor, and you will receive a different form from the attending doctor.

You also need to register the death with Births, deaths, and marriages. That can be done after disposition, but you must have all those documents correct before the day of burial and cremation.

SECOND DOCTOR

Getting a second doctor to come can be a challenge, but if you call around your medical centres there should be someone who does it, but being family-led you might get questions, and have to push quite hard. It usually costs \$100-\$200 for the doctor to attend for this purpose.

BOOKING THE CREMATION OR BURIAL

You also need to handle all the aspects of booking the burial or cremation with the cemetery trust. The large ones are equipped to manage this, smaller country cemeteries will almost certainly be freaked out when you say you're taking care of it yourself. They are likely to hang up on you! This could be very challenging or even impossible sans funeral director if you want to bury your person in a tiny country cemetery.

You will need to pay in full before the day of the cremation. If you have been wise you will have pre-purchased a cremation certificate in life, which brings the cost down by a couple of hundred dollars, but most people need to purchase at need.

REGISTER WITH BIRTHS, DEATHS AND MARRIAGES

<https://www.bdm.vic.gov.au/deaths/register-a-death>

STEP 5: TAKING YOUR PERSON TO THEIR DISPOSITION



All three of the major cemetery trusts said they do accept families bringing their own person, although they don't 'encourage' it.

All gave the proviso that they paperwork and other elements had to be completed perfectly, and they will not offer any assistance on the day beyond taking your dead person as they would from a funeral director.

GMCT offers a small amount of info on Family-Led Funerals (the gist is, they don't seem to support it, but begrudgingly admit there is no law against it) at this link:

<https://www.gmct.com.au/resources/family-led-funerals>

You'll see they put all the onus on the family. If you do want to conduct a DIY funeral with burial at GMCT, we can assist, and can also help you to ensure a smooth delivery to the Crematorium.

We offer hire of our vintage hearse (with driver), including drive-bys past the person's old haunts, work, fave places, etc. You can check out our Cadillac hearse Mama Cass at <http://vintagehearse.com.au>

ORGANISING A MEMORIAL OR SERVICE

At the end of the day, funeral directors are not so different from event managers, and much of their work is around creating a great ceremony, service, memorial or party. There is no reason why you can't do this yourself and save yourself a lot of money. However, having someone to think of all the things that need to be done, and to create ceremony around each speaker when everyone is feeling sad and in a state of grief is a big job.

One of our unique offerings is having a funeral arranger who is also a ceremony creator, to offer families a sense of intimacy in the process, and a connection to the person who has died. You may want to organise everything yourself, but still have someone come in to hold and create ceremonial space.

The only aspect that might be tricky without a funeral director is putting a death or funeral notice in the newspaper, as they often want to verify that this is legitimate. We're happy to help with this for a nominal fee.

Things to arrange and consider:

- Venue (more people come than you expect; that's always the case at funerals)
- PA & AV requirements
- Catering, Bar and staffing
- Transport for your dead person or family if you choose a funeral
- Florals or donations
- Memorial postcards or booklets & signing book
- Slideshow or video
- Music
- Coffin decoration
- Who will speak? (Be wary of open mics, there are many ways this can go awry)
- Format of the ceremony (It can be anything you want, truly!)
- Afterparty, wake or all in one

Directory

Awesome Ethical Funeral Companies and Home Funeral specialists

The Last Hurrah Funerals

0430378388 (Kimba) / 0417164065 (Nastassia)

www.lasthurrahfunerals.com.au

Undertaking Grace (Mansfield)

0406103699 (Claire) /

0477804343

www.undertakinggrace.com

Independent Mortuary Expert

Tara Mackay

(Independent Mortuary Expert & Embalmer)

taramackay@icloud.com

Death Doulas and End of Life Companions

End of Life Doula Directory

<https://www.endoflifedouladirectory.com.au/>

Annie Whitlocke (Buddhist chaplain, death elder & doula, compassionate companion)

<https://caretailors.com/providers/annie-whitlocke/>

Mariam Ardati & Sakina Funerals (Islamic death doula and funeral director)

<https://www.facebook.com/pages/category/Funeral-Service---Cemetery/Sakina-Funerals-1400100043461579/>

Legacy Makers and Keepers

Ryan Griffith: Photography
0430378388
genkigriff@gmail.com



Living Legacy Snapshots (Jamie Sax)
<https://www.livinglegacysnapshots.com.au/>

Memorialisation Options

With the Wind Aerial (Tarrod Smith)
<https://withthewind.com.au/>

Mod Urns
<https://modurn.com/>