



Sydney
Local Health District

Bereavement information



Acknowledgement of Country

Sydney Local Health District acknowledges that we are living and working on Aboriginal land. We recognise the strength, resilience and capacity of Aboriginal people on this land. We would like to acknowledge all of the traditional owners of the land and pay respect to Aboriginal Elders past and present.

Our District acknowledges *Gadigal*, *Wangal* and *Bediagal* as the three clans within the boundaries of the Sydney Local Health District. There are about 29 clan groups within the Sydney metropolitan area, referred to collectively as the great *Eora Nation*. *Always was and always will be Aboriginal Land*.

We want to build strong systems to have the healthiest Aboriginal community in Australia.

Together under the Sydney Metropolitan Partnership Agreement, including the Aboriginal Medical Service Redfern and in collaboration with the Metropolitan Local Aboriginal Land Council, Sydney Local Health District is committed to achieving equality to improve self-determination and lifestyle choices for our Aboriginal community.

Ngurang Dali Mana Burudi – A Place to Get Better

Ngurang Dali Mana Burudi — a place to get better, is a view of our whole community including health services, Aboriginal communities, families, individuals and organisations working in partnership.

Our story

Sydney Local Health District's Aboriginal Health story was created by the District's Aboriginal Health staff.

The map in the centre represents the boundaries of Sydney Local Health District. The blue lines on the map are the Parramatta River to the north and the Cooks River to the south which are two of the traditional boundaries.

The *Gadigal*, *Wangal* and *Bediagal* are the three clans within the boundaries of Sydney Local Health District. They are three of the twenty-nine clans of the great *Eora Nation*. The centre circle represents a pathway from the meeting place for Aboriginal people to gain better access to healthcare.

The Goanna or *Wirriga*

One of Australia's largest lizards, the goanna is found in the bush surrounding Sydney.

The Whale or *Gawura*

From June to October pods of humpback whales migrate along the eastern coastline of Australia to warmer northern waters, stopping off at Watsons Bay the traditional home of the Gadigal people.

The Eel or *Burra*

Short-finned freshwater eels and grey Moray eels were once plentiful in the Parramatta River inland fresh water lagoons.

Source: Sydney Language Dictionary



Artwork

Ngurang Dali Mana Burudi — a place to get better

The map was created by our Aboriginal Health staff telling the story of a cultural pathway for our community to gain better access to healthcare.

Artwork by Aboriginal artist Lee Hampton utilising our story.

On behalf of staff at Sydney Local Health District, we extend our deepest sympathy for your recent loss.

The next few weeks may be very difficult emotionally, physically and mentally.

This booklet includes information that may help you in next steps, from practical matters to accessing support services. Maybe not all of it is relevant to you, but we hope some of the information will support you through this time.

Contact person: _____

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What to do first

The death of a family member or friend can feel sudden no matter the circumstance. It is important that you, and those around you, take time to process the loss. If you have any questions that you would like answered please ask staff for assistance.

Staff will continue to care for your family member or friend with respect and dignity after their death. If your family member or friend is in hospital and you or other support people wish to see the deceased person to say goodbye, it is encouraged that you do so while they are still on the ward.

Please let staff know if there are any cultural or spiritual practices that need to be observed while the person's body is in our care. Our staff respect your cultural and spiritual traditions and will do our best to meet these needs, please let us know how we can help. If you are in hospital you can also ask to see a chaplain.

If the person has died at home some processes will be different. Please refer to page 11 for further information.

What to do in the first five days

There are a few steps that need to be taken shortly after a person has died. This includes starting the funeral arrangements (see page 6 for more information) and checking if there is a Will in place and where it is. The first place to check for a Will is the person's solicitor (if they have one).

Finding the Will

If there is a Will in place, you will need to contact the executor (this person will be nominated in the Will) to enable the executor to start the process of arranging affairs.

If there is not a Will and there is an estate to manage, a decision will need to be made to nominate a person to manage affairs. They will need to contact the Supreme Court of NSW Probate Registry. Usually this does not need to happen straight away and can be followed up later.

Call 1300 679 272

Email sc.probate@justice.nsw.gov.au

Website supremecourt.nsw.gov.au/wills-probate.html

If you don't know if there is a Will in place, and the person's solicitor doesn't know if there is a Will, call the NSW Trustee and Guardian on 1300 109 290 or visit the website tag.nsw.gov.au.

Useful information to know

- Medicare number
- date and place of birth
- date of marriage or civil partnership (if relevant)
- Tax File Number

Look after yourself

These are practical matters to attend to, but it's also important to look after yourself at this time. You can refer to page 14 for some tips on coping during this time. You may also wish to ask a friend, family member or someone you trust to assist with these practical matters.

There are other practical matters that can wait and don't need to be rushed or for you to feel pressured about at this stage. These include notifying various agencies and businesses, you can find more information about this on page 12.

Other information you might need

- full name of the deceased at their time of death
- any previously used name (e.g. maiden surname)
- their last known address
- their occupation (if relevant)
- the full name, occupation and date of birth of surviving spouse or civil partner.
- whether the deceased was receiving State Benefits (such as a Centrelink or Veteran's Affairs payment).



Arranging a funeral

A funeral service can be an important and meaningful way to say goodbye. It is common to have a funeral service before burial or cremation.

If funeral arrangements have not been pre-planned, the executor of the Will is legally responsible for organising the funeral. However, it is usually the closest Next of Kin who will make the practical arrangements. If there is no Will or identified Next of Kin, then a family member or friend may organise the funeral.

Using a funeral director

It is not compulsory to use a funeral director, but they can make things more simple and easier at a difficult time. A funeral director can help organise, and support your choices regarding:

- completion and lodgement of death registration forms
- placement of any press notices
- a venue for the service (you might like to hold the service outside, or in a place that was important to the person such as a surf club or community centre)
- planning a personalised service
- liaising with clergy or funeral celebrant (or person you choose to conduct the service)
- particular cultural or religious practices you wish to follow, such as the option to embalm and view the deceased
- cremation or burial
- flowers and order of service

Members of your family or community, or a faith leader, might also be able to give you guidance or support with this.

Once you have chosen a funeral director they will liaise with the NSW Health facility to arrange transfer of the person's body from the place where they died, into the care of the funeral director until the funeral is held.

You can personalise the funeral, so that it reflects the unique person and is meaningful for you

Finding a funeral director

NSW Health, including staff at this facility, are unable to recommend any funeral directors.

- A full listing of funeral directors is available from the Australian Funeral Directors Association, call 1300 888 188 or visit their website afda.org.au
- This national website lists funeral directors by postcode and cost gatheredhere.com.au
- Search online for 'funeral director Sydney'

Family, friends or faith centres (such as the church, mosque or temple) may be able to offer recommendations.

Funeral costs

Funeral costs can vary a lot and we suggest calling two or three funeral directors to get itemised quotes before going ahead with the arrangements. This can help you to find a funeral director that you are comfortable with, and to know the cost options. Under the law, all NSW funeral directors must provide you with an itemised quote. These quotes should make it easier for you to compare services and prices.

It is important to discuss the costs and options for paying the account at the beginning of your discussions with the funeral director. Be aware, the person who arranges the funeral is legally responsible for the account and is the only person who can make arrangements with the crematorium or cemetery, including signing all burial or cremation permits.



If the cost of a funeral is a concern you can undertake an internet search for example, 'low cost funerals Sydney'. This will give you some options as a starting point to contact for discussions. You can ask funeral directors about a payment plan or for flexibility. If you are worried that you might be unable to pay for the funeral, ask to speak with a social worker or contact person from the health service. If you have concerns about being able to pay for the funeral it is important to discuss this before making an agreement with a funeral director.

Accessing financial support

There may be other possible avenues of financial support that could help with the costs of a funeral. This could include unions, superannuation or sickness and accident insurance policies. You could check if the person had a membership or policy and contact the relevant provider. If possible, check if the person has records of pre-paying for their funeral. If you are part of a religious or faith community you may wish to reach out to them. Aboriginal or Torres Strait Islander people may have specific entitlements, please discuss with staff at your facility. Depending on the circumstances there may be an entitlement to financial assistance from Centrelink, it is best to contact Centrelink directly to check on eligibility and the claim process.

Paying from the person's bank account

If there are funds available in the deceased person's bank account most banks will make a payment to the funeral director. If there is enough money in the account the payment may cover the whole cost. If not, the payment would be for whatever amount is in the account. You would need to discuss this with the bank to see if this is possible by attending the branch with the funeral invoice and the medical certificate of

cause of death. It is best to do this before the funeral so you know how much money is available and if there are remaining costs. This process is only for funeral expenses, it is not possible for other bills.

If you have any questions or concerns regarding the practices of funeral directors, please contact the Department of Fair Trading on 13 32 20, or refer to their website for further funeral information: fairtrading.nsw.gov.au.



Important information if the person died in hospital - release from hospital

A consent form must be signed before the hospital can release a deceased person into the care of a funeral director or funeral company. The form can be signed by the Executor of the Will, or Next of Kin (if a Will doesn't exist or the Executor is not available).

An Executor of a Will is a person or organisation appointed in the Will to administer the estate. It is their job to carry out the instructions in the Will. If there is no Will or the Executor is not available, then the senior Next of Kin (or their delegate) can perform this role.

Next of Kin of a deceased child is determined by the following order of priority:

1. A parent of the child
2. A sibling of the child who is 18 years or older
3. A person who is Guardian of the child immediately before the child's death

Next of Kin of a deceased adult is determined by the following order of seniority:

1. Any person who is named as the Executor of the person's Will
2. A person who was a spouse or de-facto (including same sex partner) of the deceased immediately before the person's death
3. A child of the deceased person who is 18 years or older
4. Either of the deceased person's parents
5. A sibling of the deceased person who is 18 years or older

If the person who would be the senior Next of Kin does not wish to take on the role, they may nominate another person as their delegate.



Death certificate

The Medical Certificate of Cause of Death is a document completed by a medical practitioner who certifies the facts and circumstances of the death. It is provided by the hospital to your chosen funeral director who will, if requested, submit an application for the official Death Certificate to the Registry of Births Deaths and Marriages. It can be helpful to make multiple copies of the Death Certificate. There is a cost associated with issuing an official Death Certificate and authorised copies of the Death Certificate.

It can take several weeks for the NSW Registry of Births Deaths and Marriages to issue the official Death Certificate. If you require documentation urgently before receiving the official Death Certificate, discuss your needs with your funeral director, registry or the hospital's medico-legal department (details are available at slhd.nsw.gov.au/righttoinformation/about_accessInfo.html).



Special circumstances

Deaths reported to the NSW Coroner's Court

In some situations the circumstances surrounding a death are reported to the NSW Coroner's Court to be investigated. Coroners investigate certain kinds of deaths to determine the identity of the deceased and the date, place, circumstances and medical cause of death. There is specific NSW legislation which doctors must adhere to in relation to this process. You will be informed by hospital staff if this is required and be provided with an information sheet titled *Initial steps after a death is reported to the Coroner* for more information about the role of the coroner and the process. The coronial process can take time. You can call the Coronial Information and Support Program on 02 8584 7777 for guidance about when a funeral can be arranged.

Additional information can be sourced from coroners.nsw.gov.au

A death at home

When a person dies at home, and the death is expected and support is being provided by the community palliative care team, it is not necessary to call emergency services. The community palliative care team will discuss the process ahead of time, and will advise you on what to do.

Key points to consider

It helps to choose a funeral company in advance. This does not require planning the funeral. You can choose the funeral company you are comfortable with, and have their contact details available.

A doctor (usually the person's GP) will need to complete a Medical Certificate of Cause of Death. It is important that the GP has seen the person in the weeks before their death. If the GP cannot come to the home, a nurse, ambulance personnel, or other doctor can provide a Verification of Death document as an interim measure. Contact your community nurse or GP to discuss a plan for this.

Once the Death Certificate or Verification of Death has been issued, you can contact the funeral company to come to the home and to take the person's body into their care. After this you will have time to make further funeral arrangements.

You don't need to rush to contact the funeral director. If you would like more time at home to allow for farewells it is fine to go at your own pace. You can call the funeral director and advise them that you would like some time before they come to the home.



Who to notify

When a person has died there will be some people and organisations that will need to be notified. This will vary depending on the person's circumstances, however these are some suggestions that might be relevant.

The Australian Death Notification Service can assist with some of these notifications once the death certificate has been issued. The service doesn't cover all places you will need to notify but can help with a few. You can access the service here: deathnotification.gov.au

You may also wish to consider what to do with the person's social media accounts. Each platform has a slightly different process after a person has died. Depending on the platform you can choose to memorialise the account, delete the account or leave the account open. This website has a guide to handling social media accounts after someone has died: willed.com.au/guides/social-media-after-death

Person or organisation to be notified	Date notified (if relevant)
Relatives and friends	
GP and other doctors/specialists	
Dentist	
Community service provider (i.e. Homecare)	
Schools	
Workplace or volunteers group	
Solicitor	
Accountant	
Australian Tax Office	
Electricity provider	
Gas provider	
Water provider	
Landlord or Housing NSW	
Service NSW (Car registration)	
Financial organisations	
Superannuation fund	
Insurance companies	
Local council (if paying rates)	
Electoral office	
Centrelink	
Medicare	
Private health insurance	
Australia Post (if mail needs to be re-directed)	
Paid TV streaming services and/or internet	
Telephone companies	
Department of Veteran Affairs (if relevant)	
Clubs, memberships or subscriptions	
Other:	

Understanding grief and loss

Grief is the natural response to the loss of a family member or friend. It indicates the significant place they held, and still hold, in your heart and life.

When you haven't experienced grief previously, you may feel unprepared for a range of emotions you may feel. Common responses to grief include shock and disbelief, sadness, guilt, anger, fear, loneliness, numbness and physical symptoms like nausea, fatigue, weight gain, or difficulties sleeping.

Grief is not a static process, it is active, and please feel reassured there is no right way to grieve. It is an intensely individual process because the relationship between you and the person was unique to you both. It is sometimes helpful to understand grief as not something that happens to you, but rather it is something that you will do and so you have many choices about how you would like to proceed.

There is often an increased level of support in the days and weeks after a death. This can sometimes slow over time. There are options you may wish to consider in caring for yourself in the coming months.

Allow yourself to express emotions

- Identify someone you feel able to talk openly with and who is a good listener.
- Allow yourself to express emotions, it is okay to cry.
- Journal or write down feelings.
- Creative expression, writing letter or poem, painting or drawing.
- For stronger emotions like anger or resentment, try directing energy into physical activity like walking or running.

Looking after your wellbeing

- keep to a meal routine and drink lots of water. Sometimes you may not feel hungry, but eating and drinking water regularly is an important way to support yourself
- maintain gentle activity, such as walking, yoga, tai chi, or swimming
- spend time in nature, like at the beach, river or in bushland
- do any activity that brings you a sense of satisfaction
- you may find social situations more challenging and feel you need more time for yourself

Legacy and remembering

- Keeping memories around you and your home can help you feel connected. This may include photos, playing music that reminds you of the person or keeping to the routine you shared, such as having tea in the sun. You may wish to invite others to share these moments with you.
- Sharing memories and stories with friends and family, thoughts and feelings can be comforting and strengthen feelings of connection.
- Draw on religious or spiritual beliefs.
- Use cultural or religious practices that are meaningful for you personally.

At times you may not feel able to do any of these things. Self-compassion and being gentle with yourself are important when you are grieving.



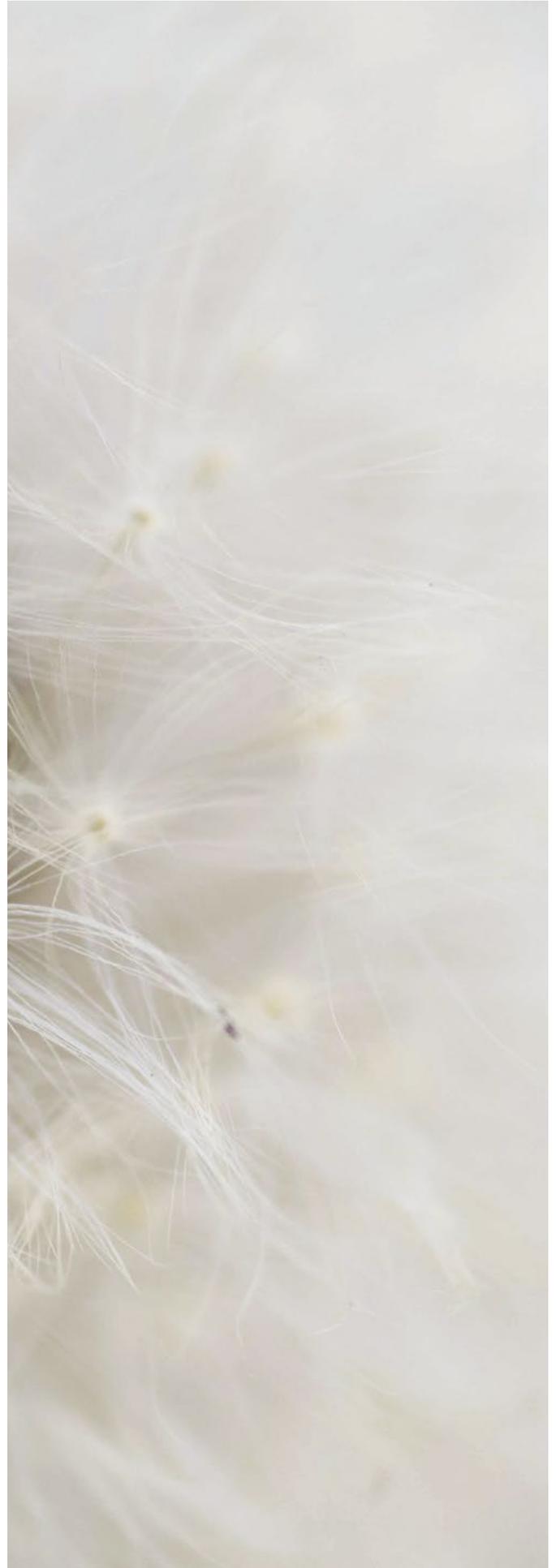
Many people find cultural or religious practices can help in their grieving process. Different cultures mourn or express their grief in diverse ways. Grief is also very personal and so you may find connecting with these practices can be helpful, or you might have a unique practice that fits better for you.

Early in the grieving process can be a time when you may feel more vulnerable than usual. During this time it is recommended to avoid major life decisions if possible. This could include decisions like selling a home. If you do need to make bigger decisions, asking for the support and assistance of people you trust can be a good idea.

When to seek further support

Although grieving is expected and individual, sometimes you might want professional support. Some indicators that you may benefit from professional support include:

- Over time, you remain preoccupied and acutely distressed or distracted by your grief.
- You experience panic attacks or other serious anxiety or depression.
- Thoughts of hopelessness.
- If you're using different coping methods more than usual, like increased or changed eating patterns, alcohol or other drugs to lessen the pain.
- Finding yourself unable to do tasks in your daily life, or find pleasure in activities you usually enjoy.
- Finding ongoing issues with sleep.
- You do not feel you have access to someone to listen to you.





Our external community, partnerships and collaborations

Hospital	Phone number
Balmain Hospital Social Work Department	9395 2111
Canterbury Hospital Social Work Department	9153 2000
Concord Hospital Social Work Department	9767 6680
Royal Prince Alfred Social Work Department	9515 9902

Grief, psychological and emotional supports:

Service	Phone number	Website
SLHD Bereavement Counselling Service	9767 5656	slhd.health.nsw.gov.au/bereavement
Australian Centre for Grief and Bereavement	1800 642 066	grief.org.au
National Association for Loss and Grief NSW	9489 6644	nalag.org.au
GriefLine	1300 845 745	griefline.org.au
Solace (support group for widows/ widowers)	9519 2820	solace.org.au
National Centre for Childhood Grief	1300 654 556	childhoodgrief.org.au
Standby – Support after suicide	1300 727 247	standbysupport.com.au
Cancer Council NSW	13 11 20	cancercouncil.com.au
Lifeline (24/7 Counselling)	131 114	lifeline.org.au
Beyond Blue Helpline	1300 224 636	beyondblue.org.au
Kids Helpline	1800 551 800	kidshelpline.com.au

Further support can also be accessed through health care professionals that you are known to including social workers, psychologists and your GP.

Supporting children

The following information may be helpful to read if there are children in your family.

When telling a child about a death, it is important to use clear and direct words such as “I have some sad news to tell you. Nanna died today.” It is helpful to answer children’s questions about death simply and honestly. If there are questions you can’t answer, you can say “I don’t know”. Being as honest as possible and clear with children is important. Explanations such as saying the person “went to sleep” or “has gone to heaven” may be confusing or at times upsetting.

Just like adults, every child or young person’s experience of grief is unique. Children’s reactions to death can vary depending on their age, stage of development, relationship with the person who has died and any previous experiences of grief. Young children may act out, their behaviour might regress or they may become more anxious following the death of someone close to them.

Ways to help

Listen and comfort. Every child reacts in their own way when they learn that someone has died. Some children cry. Some ask questions. Others seem not to react at all. Stay with your child to offer hugs or comfort. Answer their questions. Or just be together for a few minutes. Seeing your sadness or tears may help your child understand what might be happening for you, and your family.

Put feelings into words. Ask children to say what they’re thinking and feeling. Label some of your own feelings. This makes it easier for children to share theirs. You can say things like, “I know you’re feeling very sad. I’m sad, too. We both loved Nanna so much, and she loved us too.” It can help to allow children to see you express your own feelings of grief so that they know they can express themselves as well.

Tell your child what to expect. If the death of a person means changes in your child’s life or routine, explain what will happen. This helps your child feel prepared. For example, “Aunt Elizabeth will pick you up from school like Nanna used to,” or “I need to stay with Grandpa for a few days. That means you and Dad will be home taking care of each other. But I’ll talk to you every day, and I’ll be back on Sunday.”

Explain events that will happen. It can help to allow children to join in rituals like viewings, funerals, or memorial services. Tell them ahead of time what will happen. For example, “Lots of people who loved Nanna will be there. We will sing, pray, and talk about Nanna’s life. People might cry and hug. You can stay near me and hold my hand if you want.” It can also help to ask the child if they would like a role at the funeral. Having a small, active role can help children feel part of things and helps them cope. They might like to read a poem, pick a song to be played, gather some photos to display, or make something. They may like to place an object or flower on the coffin. Let children decide if they want to take part, and how.

Help your child remember the person. In the days and weeks ahead, encourage your child to draw pictures or write down stories of the person who has died. Don’t avoid talking about the person who died. Sharing happy memories can help with grief.

Useful resources

The National Centre for Childhood Grief

Call 1300 654 556
childhoodgrief.org.au

Cancer Council

This Cancer Council resource gives guidance about possible reactions children may have based on their age, and suggested approaches for support. Although the resource is from the Cancer Council, it is a useful resource for anyone with children:

cancercouncil.com.au/cancer-information/for-family-and-friends/talking-to-kids-about-cancer/advanced-cancer/different-views-of-death/

Grief Australia

This website has information about grief and supporting children and adolescents in different age groups.

Call 1800 642 066
grief.org.au/ga/Resources.aspx

The information on this page has been created using information from Kids Health, the National Centre for Childhood Grief and information from Balmain Hospital Social Work Department.

Sydney Local Health District Bereavement Counselling Service

The Sydney Local Health District Bereavement Counselling Service offers confidential counselling support and is a free service. Individual bereavement counselling is available to families and significant others who live within the geographical catchment of Sydney Local Health District, or where a family member or close friend has died in the area. This service is available for people aged over 18.

Counselling allows a time and private, safe space to talk about your grief and receive assistance and emotional support. This can help in accessing your own resources, strengths and ways of coping. You can discuss how your grief affects you and ways of managing this, in addition to your usual day to day supports.

Service is provided by appointment only, so please contact to book a session.

Contact details

Call 9767 5656

Monday to Friday, 8am to 4:30pm

slhd.health.nsw.gov.au/bereavement

Available locations

- Royal Prince Alfred Hospital
- Concord Hospital



This resource was produced by the social work departments of Sydney Local Health District and the SLHD Bereavement Counselling Service, based on resources from Royal Prince Alfred Hospital and Balmain Hospital Social Work Departments. The booklet has been developed through shared knowledge and contributions have been received with thanks.

This booklet is available in Arabic, Chinese, Greek, Korean, Italian, Vietnamese.

slhd.health.nsw.gov.au

Sydney,
it's *your* local
health district



Sydney
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