



Planning a home funeral

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For cultural, traditional or personal reasons, you may wish to have a viewing, wake or funeral in your home. The following tasks are all part of a home funeral. You can involve a funeral home for assistance or carry out all of them yourself:

- Wash and dress the body
- Make the necessary arrangements to move the body
- Arrange for a casket, shroud, or urn
- Organize the details of the service
- Arrange for burial or cremation
- Complete the paperwork required by the vital statistics agency in your province or territory. This commonly includes the registration of death, medical certificate of death, and burial permit.

See also: [Care of the Body after Death](#)

Moving the Body

If the person dies in a hospital, hospice or long-term care facility, you will need to make arrangements to bring his or her body home. You may also be moving the body between home and a funeral home or crematorium prior to a home funeral, and/or from home to a cemetery for burial. You will need to arrange and pay for transportation of the body on a stretcher in a suitable vehicle. Check with the vital statistics agency in your province/territory (See list below) to find out if you need a permit for these moves. For a fee, you can arrange for transportation with a body transfer service or local funeral home.

If you plan to move the body from a bed into a casket, keep in mind that you may require six or more people to do so. Talk with your friends and family in advance to ensure that they are comfortable with moving or touching the body of someone who has died.

Caskets, Urns and Shrouds

In Canada, the law requires that a body be either buried in an approved cemetery or cremated. If cremation is chosen, the ashes may be retained or buried. If your family member has not expressed a preference, the traditions of your family and community and practical matters may help you decide. When arranging for burial of the body or ashes, check out costs, transportation, and any rules that may affect your plans. You will need a casket, container or shroud for burial or cremation. Check with your local funeral board (see below) about the regulations that apply in your area.

Caskets can be purchased from a funeral home, casket store or other commercial outlet. They vary widely in price depending on their materials and how ornate they are. Most funeral homes carry plywood caskets and cardboard containers. These can be decorated by family members with art work or messages of remembrance, gratitude or blessing.

You can make a casket at home. If you need help, ask a family member or friend with carpentry skills. Be sure to size the casket to fit through doorways and around corners in the home. If cremation is to take place, you may also want to make or purchase an urn or box to receive the ashes after cremation. This also can be decorated by friends and family members.

Wrapping or sewing a body into a sheet-like garment called a shroud is one of the oldest ways of preparing a body for burial or cremation. For more information on shrouds, see the [Canadian Integrative Network for Death Education and Alternatives \(CINDEA\) website](#). If you use a shroud, you may not need a casket or other container. A rented stretcher can be used to lay the body out for viewing at home and transporting the body to the cemetery or crematorium. If the body is to be buried, check whether the cemetery allows burial in shrouds.

Ceremonies: Viewings, Wakes, and Vigils

Every family will have a different idea about what a home funeral or ceremony should look like. There is no right or wrong way to do this. Following any known wishes of your loved one and your family is a good place to start. Including religious, cultural and family traditions is also important. If you want a funeral service for the larger community, you may need to consider a larger space in a worship centre, community hall or a funeral home.

Having your family member's body at home before cremation and/or burial allows relatives and friends to mourn with you. You can remember the person together, share your grief, and support each other. A home viewing is an opportunity to find closure after a person dies and to honour him or her.

If your cultural practice or family tradition is to invite friends and family to sit with the body or ashes prior to the funeral, choose a space large enough for the coffin, shroud or urn and for people to come and say goodbye. Have a few chairs available to allow visitors to spend time together and share stories and memories. If space is a concern, consider using a funeral home or community facility.

Some communities honour the deceased person with a wake. During a wake, relatives and friends may hold a vigil or keep watch over the body before burial. They may celebrate his or her life by sharing food and drink, memories, prayers, readings, blessings, farewells, singing, chanting, tributes, and/or toasts. This may be all the ceremony that is needed to honour the wishes of the deceased person and the needs of your family.

See also: [Rituals to Comfort Families](#)

Burial and Cremation

You will need to obtain a permit for burial or cremation from the vital statistics agency when you file the *Medical Certificate of Death and Registration of Death Form*.

For **burial**, provincial and municipal laws and regulations stipulate where and how a casket can be buried. Your local cemetery or funeral home will be able to assist with the information you need. Burial often cannot be undertaken by family alone. You may also need to arrange transportation of the casket to the cemetery.

Cremation is the burning of the body in intense heat until only ashes remain. This is done at a crematorium, which is a building designed for this purpose. Some crematoriums allow the family to gather by the cremation chamber to say their final farewells. Check with the crematorium you plan to use about:

- the kind of container the body must be in for cremation
- arrangements for close family members to be present at the time of cremation.

After cremation, you will be given the ashes in a small cardboard box or other container. If you wish, you can transfer these to an urn or other container.

Ashes may be buried in a cemetery or placed in a columbarium, a special room or building with niches designed for holding urns. Some funeral homes or faith groups have special gardens for burying ashes. If you wish to bury them in a place not designated for this purpose, make sure you have permission.

Your family members may choose to divide the ashes, which would allow them to bury or scatter the ashes in different places. Dividing the ashes also gives family members the opportunity to create their own keepsakes. Some people place ashes in a locket or a picture frame with a picture of the deceased.

You may wish to scatter the ashes in some place that has special significance for you as a family or for the person who has died. Generally, there are no laws that prohibit the scattering of ashes. However, you may find these guidelines helpful:

- Before scattering ashes in public places such as parks, check whether any municipal bylaws

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- Get permission before scattering ashes on private property. This includes commercial private properties such as golf courses.

The final placement or scattering of ashes can be a meaningful ritual for your family and friends. You can reflect on what you have shared with the deceased person as you release him or her to the wider world. If appropriate, you can include prayers or readings expressing gratitude for life and trust in the Creator.

Vital Statistics Agencies for each province/territory

[British Columbia](#)

[Alberta](#)

[Saskatchewan](#)

[Manitoba](#)

[Ontario](#)

[Quebec](#)

[New Brunswick](#)

[Nova Scotia](#)

[Prince Edward Island](#)

[Newfoundland and Labrador](#)

[Northwest Territories](#)

[Yukon](#)

[Nunavut](#)

[Funeral Service Association of Canada](#)

Provincial Funeral Boards and Associations

[British Columbia Funeral Association](#)

[Alberta Funeral Services Regulatory Board](#)

[Funeral and Cremation Services Council of Saskatchewan](#)

[Manitoba Funeral Service Association](#)

[Bereavement Authority of Ontario](#)

[Corporation des thanatologues du Québec](#)

[New Brunswick Funeral Directors and Embalmers Association](#)

[Funeral Service Association of Nova Scotia](#)

[Embalmers and Funeral Directors Board of Newfoundland and Labrador](#)

Post-Death Care and Funeral Planning

[Canadian Integrative Network for Death Education and Alternatives \(CINDEA\)](#)

[Joan Halifax "Care of the Body After Death"](#)

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