

Bereavement care and support after perinatal loss

This information sheet is for parents who have experienced a perinatal loss. It provides information on the bereavement care and support that should be provided after the loss.



What is perinatal loss?

The term *perinatal loss* is used in this information sheet to describe any form of pregnancy loss, including from miscarriage, stillbirth, ectopic pregnancy, termination of pregnancy or the death of a newborn.

While the advice included in this information sheet mainly relates to the loss of a baby that involved a birth (for example, stillbirth or the death of a newborn), the same principles of care apply to other forms of pregnancy loss.

Bereavement care

The death of a baby is a distressing experience for parents, their families and support people. This is regardless of when the death has occurred, or the reasons for the death.

If you have experienced the death of a baby, or are told that your baby will not live long because of a life-limiting condition, you will be offered care to support your physical, emotional, psychological and spiritual wellbeing.

Your clinician should ask you about your personal, cultural and religious or spiritual needs and preferences during this time, and support your decisions about the care you receive.

You should expect that any information your clinician shares with you (whether verbal or written) is provided in a way that meets your language and literacy needs.

Your clinician should offer you access to an interpreter, an Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander health worker or liaison officer, or cross-cultural health worker depending on your needs.

The clinicians involved in your care should answer any questions that you may have about your care and give you and your support people the time that you need to make decisions.

Your clinician should provide you with information about arranging a commemorative service, funeral or other mourning rituals for your baby if you wish, and support you to make an unhurried decision. They can also provide you with information about your eligibility for financial support, where available.

Your physical and mental wellbeing after perinatal loss

If you have given birth, your clinician will discuss ways to support your physical recovery. This may include providing information and advice relating to breast milk production (lactation), vaginal bleeding, wound care and physical activity. Some women may prefer to stop their body from making breast milk by using medication, while others may choose to continue lactating and/or donate their breast milk through a milk bank (where available) to help another family.

A post-natal check with a general practitioner or obstetrician within six weeks of birth will be recommended. You should let your clinician know if you have any questions, and expect to be supported to make decisions about your care that are right for you.

Your clinician may also discuss the impact the death of a baby can have on your mental health and wellbeing. It is normal to feel grief and sadness after the loss. For some parents, these feelings can become worse over time, or mental health issues may arise. Your clinician can refer you to a healthcare provider or recommend where to get help and support.

Before leaving the hospital, you should expect to be given the details of someone you can contact if you have any questions or concerns after discharge. Your clinician should also give you information about support services that are available outside of the hospital, including bereavement care or other parent support organisations, psychological support services. Your clinician can arrange formal referrals to these services with your consent.

Your clinician should also acknowledge the grief that other members of your family, or support people may be experiencing, including the baby's grandparents and siblings. They will explain that it is important for them to speak to someone if they require support, and discuss what support services are available for them.

Support after leaving the hospital

Your clinician will offer you a follow-up appointment to check on your physical and emotional wellbeing. This could include discussing the results of clinical investigations, if available, including anything that may affect your decisions about future pregnancies.

As some parents may require support beyond this time, your clinician will discuss available options for ongoing support, depending on your needs and preferences.

Your clinician will also refer you to your GP for follow-up care and support. With your permission, your clinician will share information about your baby's death with your GP promptly, including the circumstances surrounding the death, and recommendations to support your physical, emotional and psychological wellbeing. They can also arrange referrals to clinicians with specific training and expertise in bereavement care for pregnancy loss, such as a psychologist or qualified social worker, if this is something you would prefer.

Stillbirth and death of a newborn

If your baby has died before birth

When it is recognised that your baby has died before you give birth, your clinician will have a discussion with you about next steps.

This may include arranging for you to give birth through induction of labour or caesarean section, if you are not already in labour.

All pain relief options for labour and birth will be discussed with you and you will be given time to make up your mind. Your clinician will also understand that you may change your mind, and will provide care that best supports you and your individual situation.

After the loss of your baby

The care that is provided to you after your loss should be sensitive to your needs.

For example, your clinician can:

- Arrange to have discussions with you in a private, quiet area that is separate from other mothers and newborn babies
- Let other staff members who are caring for you know that your baby has died
- Involve family members or other support people of your choice in helping you to make decisions about your care
- Ensure you are given time to spend with your baby following the birth, in a private space.

You should be given the opportunity to organise mementos of your baby, if this is something you would like to do. This may include things such as:

- Taking photos with your baby
- Keeping a lock of your baby's hair
- Having your baby's hand and footprints taken
- Creating cot cards or name tags for your baby
- Arranging meaningful rituals such as a memorial service or other mourning rituals with the assistance of spiritual support people.

If you would like to take your baby home, or to another place that is important to you, your clinician will discuss the options that are available with you.

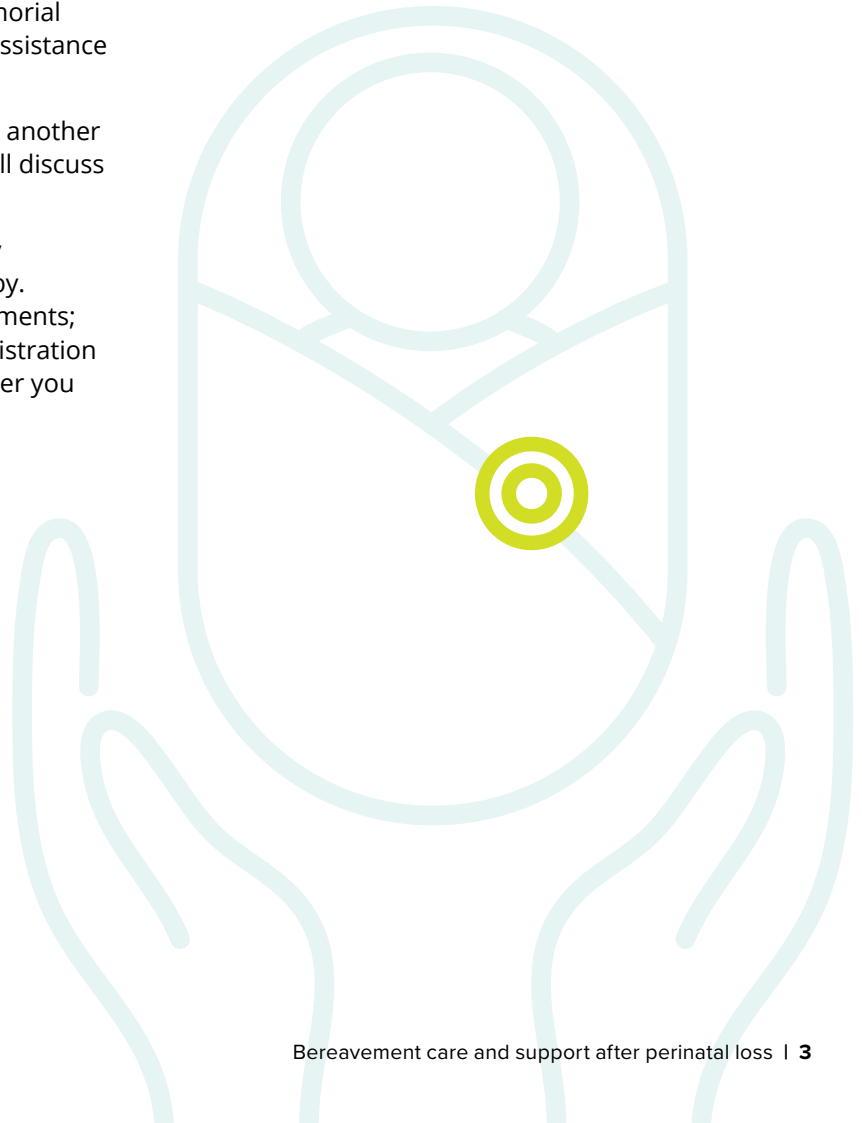
You can also receive practical support with any arrangements to do with the death of your baby. This may include making or cancelling appointments; completing documentation, including birth registration paperwork; and receiving suitable supports after you leave the hospital.

What is the Stillbirth Clinical Care Standard?

The *Stillbirth Clinical Care Standard* describes the health care that should be provided to women who are pregnant or planning a pregnancy, from before pregnancy to after a stillbirth occurs.

It also addresses bereavement care for parents (and their support people) who have experienced any perinatal loss, including stillbirth, miscarriage, termination of pregnancy and neonatal death.

For more information, or to read the full clinical care standard visit: safetyandquality.gov.au/stillbirth-ccs



Where to get more information

- Better Health Channel – [Death of a baby](#)
- Centre of Perinatal Excellence – [Coping with pregnancy loss](#)
- Pregnancy, Birth and Baby – [Experiencing a pregnancy loss](#)
- Red Nose Grief and Loss:
 - [When your baby is stillborn or dies soon after birth](#)
 - [Making the most of your time together after a stillbirth or neonatal death](#)
 - [Taking photographs and creating memories of your baby in hospital](#)
 - [A mother's health after a stillbirth or neonatal death](#)
 - [Your rights and obligations or decisions when your baby has been born still or died soon after birth](#)
 - [Grief and feeling of loss after a stillbirth or neonatal death](#)
 - [Support](#)
 - [How others can help](#)
- Stillbirth and Neonatal Death Support (Sands) Australia:
 - [A father's grief](#)
 - [A partner's grief](#)
 - [Children and grief](#)
 - [A grandparent's journey](#)

Where to get help

- [Red Nose](#) – Tel. 1300 998 698
- [Red Nose Grief and Loss](#) – 24/7 Bereavement Support Line – Tel. 1300 308 307
- [Stillbirth and Neonatal Death Support \(SANDS\) Australia](#) – 24/7 Bereavement Support Line – Tel. 1300 308 307
- [Australian Centre for Grief and Bereavement](#) – Tel. 1800 642 066
- [Bears of Hope](#) – Tel. 1300 114 673
- [Post and Antenatal Depression Association](#) – Tel. 1300 726 306
- [Still Aware](#)
- [Stillbirth Foundation Australia](#)

Questions?



Find out more about the *Stillbirth Clinical Care Standard* and other resources. Scan the QR code or use the link safetyandquality.gov.au/stillbirth-ccs

The Australian Commission on Safety and Quality in Health Care has produced this clinical care standard to support the delivery of appropriate care for a defined condition. The clinical care standard is based on the best evidence available at the time of development. Healthcare professionals are advised to use clinical discretion and consideration of the circumstances of the individual patient, in consultation with the patient and/or their carer or guardian, when applying information contained within the clinical care standard. Consumers should use the information in the clinical care standard as a guide to inform discussions with their healthcare professional about the applicability of the clinical care standard to their individual condition.