

Following sudden death from road trauma



Following a death from road trauma, there are legal and practical processes relating to the person's family being notified and the required stages for the deceased's body to go through. The information below provides a brief description of these steps. Further information can be obtained by contacting the organisations listed at the back of this fact sheet.

Police notification

Police attend every road crash where someone has been fatally or critically injured. The police are responsible for informing the family of the deceased or seriously injured that a road trauma has occurred. This is usually done in person. During this visit, the police will provide a brochure that outlines information about the post mortem process.

The police will also need to talk to the family of the deceased, sometimes several times, to ask questions and verify details following a death, in order to prepare a report for their investigation.

Deceased transfer

Once the police have attended the scene of the road trauma, they arrange for the person's body to be taken to the State Mortuary for metropolitan incidents or the local regional hospital mortuary for incidents in regional Western Australia.



The police are responsible for informing the family of the deceased or seriously injured that a road trauma has occurred.



Visual identification

In order to formally identify the deceased, the police will arrange for a visual identification to be conducted. The police will usually ask a family member to attend the mortuary accompanied by a police officer to formally identify the deceased. It is recommended that you bring a support person with you when you attend the identification. The police officer or mortuary assistant can also support you and help you to prepare for the experience by answering any questions you may have and sensitively describing what you are about to see. Once you have identified the deceased, you are asked to sign a statement of identification.

Post mortem

The Coroner decides whether a post mortem examination is required. In Australia, the law requires that a post mortem be conducted where someone has died suddenly or in unusual circumstances. The post mortem is an external (and sometimes, internal) examination of the body, which assists in finding the medical cause of death. This usually takes place within the first 48 hours, but this time frame will usually be longer for deaths in some regional areas.

The majority of post mortems are conducted at the State Mortuary in Perth, but in some cases they may be conducted at a regional hospital. In regional areas, information can be obtained from the local police

station or the Coroner's Office (see the back page).

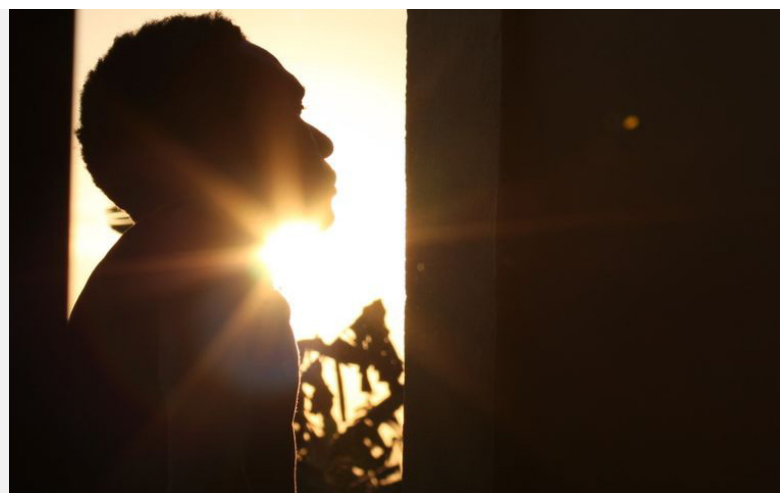
Once the post mortem is completed, and the cause of death has been established, a detailed report is sent to the Coroner. It outlines all the medical findings and conclusions. A letter is also sent to the family of the deceased confirming the cause of death. This is stated purely in medical terms, and does not include all of the information contained in the post mortem report.

If a family member wishes to know the contents of the full autopsy report, a request in writing must be made to the Coroner. As this is a medical document, using medical terms which can easily be misunderstood, a copy is forwarded to the next of kin's medical practitioner (GP), upon request. The family member can then make an appointment with the GP to have the report explained. The full report cannot be released to the family.

You have the right to object to a post mortem being conducted, but you will need to have grounds for this, such as religious or cultural reasons.

If you wish to object, you will need to contact the Coroner's Office or the Police Coronial Investigation Unit (if after hours) as soon as possible after being notified of the death. As a minimum, a period of at least 24 hours is allowed to enable objections to the post mortem to be received. An objection will still be responded to at any time prior to the examination commencing.

In order to formally identify the deceased, the **police will arrange for a visual identification to be conducted.**





Police findings

The police will also forward a report of their investigation into the crash to the Coroner. Again, a copy of the report is not issued to the family, but the family may request to view the report at the Coroner's office. This can be done by contacting the Coronial Counselling Service and requesting an appointment.

Coronial Counselling Service

The Coronial Counselling Service is a free counselling service for families and friends of the deceased person. They can answer questions about objecting to a post-mortem, coronial processes, making arrangements to see the deceased, obtaining death certificates and medical information. They can also provide counselling for trauma and loss.

Victim Support Service

The Victim Support Service provides free counselling and support services for all victims of crime. If your loved one has been killed as a result of negligent or dangerous driving, they can assist you by providing information about the police investigation, criminal injuries compensation and the criminal justice system. They can also assist you to prepare for and support you during a court case. It is not a requirement for a charge to be laid for an offence in order to be eligible for support.

Organ and tissue donation

Depending on how and where a person dies, they may be able to donate their organs and/or tissue. The next of kin may give consent for donation if the deceased person was not a registered donor. DonateLife WA staff may contact you to talk about donation. If you don't wish to be contacted by DonateLife, please let the police or coronial staff know.

A Donor Family Support Coordinator (DFSC) is available to ensure that donor families can make an informed decision and have access to support services. The DFSC is able to refer donor families for a number of free counselling sessions if required.

Funeral director

While these processes are taking place, it is essential for the next of kin to contact the preferred funeral director and give authority for them to collect the deceased person once the post mortem has been conducted. Funeral arrangements can be made, but the funeral cannot be conducted until the Coroner has issued a certificate of burial or cremation.

You may wish to speak to a number of different funeral directors to find out what services they offer and how much it will cost. The funeral director should provide a written quotation. It is recommended that you check if you can obtain assistance with funeral costs from the person's private health or car insurance, or the Insurance Commission of WA.



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Support services/websites/blogs

Coroner's Office and Counselling Service

www.coronerscourt.wa.gov.au
(08) 9425 2900 or 1800 671 994 (country callers)
0419 904 478 (after 4:30pm and weekends)

WA Police Coronial Investigation Unit

(08) 9267 5700 (7am - 2am)

State Mortuary

(08) 6383 4881

DonateLife

www.donatelife.gov.au | (08) 9222 0222 or
(08) 6457 3333 (24hr on-call Donor Coordinator)
Alternatively, see Sir Charles Gardiner Hospital

Victim Support Service

www.victimsofcrime.wa.gov.au
(08) 9425 2850 or 1800 818 988 (free call)

Insurance Commission of Western Australia

www.icwa.wa.gov.au | (08) 9264 3333
1800 643 338 (country callers)

Further support services

Lifeline 13 11 14

Kids Helpline 1800 55 1800 (ages 5-25)

Crisis Care 9223 1111 or 1800 199 008 (free call)

GriefLine 1300 845 745

Rural Link 1800 552 002

About us

Road Trauma Support WA is a state-wide service assisting anyone affected by road trauma, regardless of when the incident occurred or what level of involvement (direct or indirect) the person had.

FREE counselling sessions are available.

No referral required.

We provide:

- Information and support;
- Education and training (costs may apply); and
- Counselling.

We are committed to being respectful of cultural and family values and provide our service in a safe, non-judgemental environment.

Road Trauma Support WA is delivered by Injury Matters with funding from the Road Trauma Trust Account and contract management through the Road Safety Commission.



Every year in WA, thousands of people are impacted by road trauma. Losing family and friends, dealing with injuries, caring for those injured, causing a crash or witnessing a serious crash can have a devastating and enduring impact.

