

Death Overseas

Each year around 1,000 Australians die overseas, usually through illness or accident. The death of a family member or friend is always distressing. When the death occurs overseas, this can make the circumstances even more difficult.

This brochure provides information to help you understand what to do when a relative or friend dies overseas. Consular staff in Australia and overseas will do what they can to assist you during this difficult time. However, there are legal and practical limits to what can be done on their behalf.

Travel insurance

Many Australians travel overseas without adequate insurance cover. Without travel insurance, the family is responsible for the funeral arrangements and costs. This includes the cost of the return of the deceased to Australia.

Travel insurance that covers costs incurred as a result of death can significantly reduce stress when a death occurs overseas.

Insurance companies will generally:

- provide a list of funeral directors in the foreign country
- provide advice on local funeral services
- cover costs and make most of the arrangements for a local funeral service or the return of the deceased to Australia

We strongly recommend that all Australians travelling overseas take out travel insurance to cover the costs of hospitalisation and medical treatment should they become ill overseas, as well as costs incurred as a result of death.

Consular role

We provide consular services through our headquarters in Canberra and through Australian missions (embassies, high commissions and consulates). Details of what we can and cannot do to assist Australians who have lost a relative or friend overseas are set out below. We can often help with our knowledge and understanding of the local environment, but we must work within the legal and administrative processes that apply in the foreign country.

We can:

- assist family and friends to understand the legal and administrative processes that apply in that country
- provide a list of local funeral directors and lawyers
- liaise with the local funeral director so they are aware of Australian quarantine regulations
- provide a list of translators if an English-speaking funeral service company is not available

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- advise on the estimated cost of local burial, local cremation or transport of the deceased back to Australia
- advise on how to transfer funds from Australia to meet any costs
- provide advice on managing media enquiries.

We cannot:

- recommend a funeral director or lawyer
- investigate the death of an Australian citizen
- interpret or translate documents
- give legal advice
- pay burial or cremation expenses
- pay for or organise the return of the deceased to Australia
- take responsibility for freighting personal effects
- intervene in legal matters relating to a death overseas or to a deceased estate
- pay any outstanding debts the deceased may have.

The *Consular Services Charter* sets out the standards of service all Australians can expect to receive from consular staff, including what they can and cannot do, and is available at smartraveller.gov.au.

Death of a family member

What happens if a family member dies overseas?

Under international law, the local authorities should notify nearest Australian mission of the death of an Australian citizen.

After we are notified of the death, we will contact the police in the relevant Australian state or territory, who will visit the family (or other contact nominated in the deceased's passport application) to inform them of the death. The family can then contact us on the 24-hour Consular Emergency Centre on **+61 2 6261 3305** or **1300 555 135** (local call cost within Australia) for further details.

If a third party notifies us of the death of an Australian overseas, we will always confirm the death with the local authorities in that country before notify next of kin.

If you've been advised directly of the death of a family member overseas you can contact the 24-hour Consular Emergency Centre for assistance.

Does the family or next of kin have to travel to the country?

It's not necessary for family or next of kin to travel overseas to deal with funeral arrangements unless they wish to. The Australian mission in the country can assist by providing the family or next of kin with a list of local funeral directors, who will liaise with Australian funeral directors

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regarding funeral and repatriation arrangements in accordance with the family or next of kin's wishes.

Death of a travelling companion

What should I do if my travelling companion dies?

It's important that you report the death of any Australian overseas to an Australian mission. The contact details for Australian missions are available at dfat.gov.au/missions.

Ideally, you should provide the following details about the deceased when report the death:

- full name
- date of birth
- passport number, place and date of issue
- details of immediate family member or close friend
- whether they had travel insurance and if so, the name and contact details of the company.

The local police will be involved if the death is unexpected and didn't occur in a hospital. Hotel staff or the Australian mission can assist you to notify the local police if required.

Returning to Australia

You will need to appoint a funeral director overseas to assist you with funeral arrangements. We can provide you with a list of funeral directors in the foreign country. If you wish to return your loved one to Australia you will also need to appoint a funeral director in Australia. They will arrange the cremation or burial in Australia.

The funeral director will consult you and make every effort to meet the your wishes or that of the deceased. The funeral director will provide options for local burial, cremation or repatriation of the deceased back to Australia, and local funeral directors will make every effort to meet the wishes of the deceased or their next of kin.

You should be aware, however, in some countries and in certain circumstances, local regulations and conditions may require a quick decision on what to do with the remains. In some cases, local authorities may require an autopsy before a death certificate or other documentation can be issued.

How long will it take for the return of the deceased to Australia?

The time required to return the deceased to Australia depends on local regulations and circumstances. In some cases, it can take several weeks. It may take longer if, for example, there is a need for an autopsy or coronial enquiry to determine the cause of death.

Do I need to register the death in Australia?

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Although it is not compulsory, you may wish to register the death in Australia. Information on how to do this is available from the Registrar of Births, Deaths and Marriages in the state where the person resided.

Further information may also be available from the Registrar of Deaths Abroad, GPO Box 158, Canberra ACT 2601. Tel: **02 6207 0460**, Fax **02 6207 0895**, website ors.act.gov.au

Media

Consular staff will make every effort to ensure relatives do not first learn of a death via the media. This cannot always be prevented. If you hear of the death from a journalist, you should contact the 24-hour Consular Emergency Centre on **+61 2 6261 3305** (from anywhere in the world) or **1300 555 135** (local call cost within Australia). We will seek to confirm the death with local authorities. We can also provide advice to immediate family or next of kin on how best to manage media enquiries.

Getting help overseas

Consular services

Contact details for Australian missions overseas are available at dfat.gov.au/missions.

Australia has an agreement with Canada to provide consular assistance to Australians in some countries. Contact details for Canadian missions providing consular assistance to Australians are also at dfat.gov.au/missions.

The 24-hour Consular Emergency Centre in Canberra can be contacted for assistance from anywhere in the world on **+61 2 6261 3305** or **1300 555 135** (local call cost within Australia).

Contact the travel insurance provider

Travel insurance companies often have 24-hour assistance centres that you can contact from anywhere in the world. If your family member or travelling companion dies overseas, you should contact their travel insurance provider as soon as possible. Consider leaving travel insurance policy details with family or friends back home in the case they need to access this information quickly.

Counselling services

Australians overseas who need counselling services can contact our Consular Emergency Centre on **+61 2 6261 3305** to be transferred to a Lifeline telephone crisis supporter.

While every care has been taken in preparing this brochure, neither the Australian Government nor its agents or employees, including any member of Australia's diplomatic and consular staff abroad, can accept liability for any injury, loss or damage arising in respect of any statement contained herein.

Consular Policy Branch
Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade, RG Casey Building

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John McEwen Crescent
BARTON ACT 0221
Tel. (02) 6261 3305; 1300 555 135

Information for travellers and travel advisories are available from the Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade's Smartraveller website smartraveller.gov.au. February 2019