

## **Making Funeral Decisions**

Conservation burial grounds are central hubs for disseminating accurate and comprehensive information. The Conservation Burial Alliance has developed this document for anyone exploring potential pathways to making informed decisions that encompass the full continuum from diagnosis to disposition. We welcome specific questions regarding local customs, providers, resources, rules, and protocols.

### **IN BRIEF**

#### **Family-Directed**

Next-of-kin has the constitutional right to care for their own dead in every state. This includes bathing, dressing, and shrouding or casketing, cooling, and otherwise preparing the body for disposition. This is important especially in the case of a natural burial where chemical preservation is prohibited. In ten states (CT, FL, IL, IA, IN, LA, MI, NE, NJ, and NY), other necessary steps may require funeral home engagement. Next-of-kin in unrestricted states may choose to complete filing, arranging, and transportation, or hire help for specific tasks.

#### **Blended**

When the next-of-kin chooses to keep or bring the deceased home, they may hire a funeral home to assist with transportation, paperwork filing, and any other item the family is unwilling or unable to do. This is a blended funeral, based on partnership between families and professionals that empowers and assures family members in equal measure.

#### **Professionally Directed**

Licensed funeral directors are prepared to complete all tasks required by the State when paid by the family.

#### **Designated Agent**

Many states provide alternative authority to an agent who has been designated to perform funeral arrangements on behalf of the decedent in written form prior to the death. Some states provide exact language in their statutes; others will accept a universal form. Some require only witnesses; some require that the paperwork be notarized.

#### **Assistants and Helpers**

While only licensed individuals can conduct funeral care for pay, other helpers may be enlisted to support the family. End of life doulas may charge for individuals and family support prior to the death as long as it doesn't cross the line into funeral arranging as defined by each state's professional regulations. Home funeral guides, or after death care educators, likewise may not be paid for anything a funeral director is licensed to do. Community care groups are trained to support the family in many ways, including logistics, meals, carrying and transporting the body. The next-of-kin remains in charge at all times.

## RESOURCES

- Conservation Burial Alliance <https://conservationburialalliance.org>
- Green Burial Council <https://greenburialcouncil.org>
- Funeral Consumers Alliance in your state or region <https://funerals.org>
- Funeral Resources.org in your state <https://nhfuneral.org> (AZ, MD, NH, OR, VA, VT, WV)
- National Home Funeral Alliance <https://homefuneralalliance.org>
- National End of Life Doula Alliance <https://nedalliance.org>
- National Funeral Directors Association <https://nfda.org>
- The Conversation Project <https://theconversationproject.org>
- Caring Info <https://www.caringinfo.org>
- Find a green burial ground <https://www.nhfuneral.org/green-burial-cemeteries-in-the-us-and-canada.html>
- Funerary Artisans Collective <https://funeraryartisanscollective.org>
- No One Dies Alone <https://nosdaf.com>
- The Twilight Brigade <http://help.thetwilightbrigade.com/>
- Patriot Guard Riders <https://patriotguard.org>
- Veteran's Administration Military Honors Scheduling <https://www.va.gov/burials-memorials/schedule-a-burial/>

## PREPARING ADVANCE DIRECTIVES

### Who can provide assistance with getting all my affairs in order, including funeral planning?

- Trained Advance Directive experts
- Estate Attorneys
- Clergy
- End of Life Doulas with training
- Home funeral guides with training
- Hospitals, Medical Offices
- Online Services
- Senior Centers

## GETTING HELP DURING THE DYING TIME

### Who can provide support during the dying time?

- Hospice
- Home Health
- Visiting Nurses
- End-of-life doulas
- Clergy
- Community Care Committees
- The Twilight Brigade
- No One Dies Alone

## WHO CAN LEGALLY CARE FOR THE DEAD

### Who can conduct after-death care of the deceased?

#### *Professional Funeral Service*

Licensed funeral directors\*

#### *Family-Directed:*

- Friends and family
- Community Care Committees or Groups
- Home Funeral Guides
- After-Death Care Educators

*\*Only funeral directors may be paid for hands-on care of the dead*

#### *Designated Agent*

## OBTAINING FUNERAL AND DISPOSITION PRODUCTS

### What products are available and where can I find them?

#### *Professional Funeral Service:*

- Casket rentals
- Casket purchases
- Vault purchases
- Urns (wood, metal, and other materials)
- Keepsakes

#### *Family-Directed:*

- Shrouds made from linen, cotton, hemp, wool, family blankets, sheets, or quilts
- Homemade softwood caskets, trays, urns, shrouding boards
- Local artisan-made caskets, urns, trays, shrouding boards
- Online sources for biodegradable caskets, trays, urns
- Big Box store caskets, urns

## WHO FILES THE DEATH CERTIFICATE?

### Who can file legal paperwork (death certificate, medical certification)?\*

- Professional Funeral Service
- Next-of-Kin
- Designated Agent (by state)
- Physician of Record
- Hospice RN

*\*Different states have different laws around who can file and certify a death certificate, some stipulate deadlines for filing.*

## WHO CAN DRIVE THE DECEDENT TO THE DISPOSITION SITE?

### Who can transfer the deceased to place of final disposition?\*

#### *Professional Funeral Service:*

- Transport service
- Funeral home employees under a funeral director's supervision

#### *Family-Directed:*

- Next-of-kin or family representative with NOK supervision

#### *Designated Agent*

*\*Different states have different laws around who can and must perform transportation.*

## WHAT ARE MY FUNERAL CHOICES?

### What services are performed?

#### *Professional Funeral Service:*

- Embalming~
- Disinfection
- Other Preparation of the Body (cosmetics, reconstruction, hair care)
- Sheltering in the facility (with or without refrigeration)
- Transporting\*
- Filing required paperwork\*
- Issuing/obtaining burial/transit permit\*
- Facilitating forwarding and receiving
- Making disposition appointments
- Hiring musicians, clergy
- Purchasing flowers, prayer cards
- Clothing rentals
- Arranging military honors, patriot riders, honor guards
- Arranging memorial services
- Supervising disposition\*

#### *Family-Directed:*

- Bathing
- Dressing
- Shrouding
- Sheltering in the home or other location
- Cooling with Techni ice®, air conditioning, cooling blankets, or other means
- Casketing
- Holding vigil
- Making disposition appointments
- Hiring musicians, clergy
- Purchasing or picking flowers
- Designing ceremony or services with or without clergy, officiants
- Arranging military honors, patriot riders, honor guards
- Transporting\*
- Filing required paperwork\*
- Obtaining burial/transit permit\*

*~All states require a licensed funeral director to perform embalming*

*\*Some states may require a funeral director to complete this task*

## BURIAL, CREMATION, AND OTHER DISPOSITION METHODS

### What disposition choices are there?\*

- Conventional burial (*with a concrete or fiberglass vault, embalming, metal or rainforest wood casket allowed*)
- Flame cremation (*dissolution of soft tissue by incineration*)
- Hybrid burial (*burial in the green section of a municipal, church, or other public cemetery that otherwise allows vaults, embalming, and non-biodegradable caskets*)\*
- Natural burial (*body to earth burial without vaults, embalming, or non-biodegradable caskets*)\*
- Conservation burial (*natural burial on land conserved in perpetuity*)\*
- Alkaline hydrolysis (*dissolution of soft tissue by lye solution process*)\*
- Human composting (*dissolution of soft tissue by microbial process*)\*

*\*Not all states or regions legalize this option or have it available*