

Bereavement Care Standards

The Tasmanian Department of Health and Human Services (DHHS) and the Centre for Rural Health (CRH) at the University of Tasmania are currently conducting a review of ‘bereavement care standards’ that are in use nationally and internationally. This is the first step in a process to identify which features of bereavement care standards may be useful in a Tasmanian setting.

What are bereavement care standards?

Bereavement care standards are developed as a series of stated principles regarding the care of bereaved individuals and families. Standards may ensure that people who deliver care and support ‘do so safely, ethically and appropriately’ or they may provide a practical means of achieving principles of good practice. Only a relatively small number of organisations have developed bereavement care standards or identified bereavement care principles to guide bereavement support in the community and in the palliative care environment. Standards are generally composed using a series of steps, including the formation of a steering group, a stakeholder event that brings together representatives from statutory, voluntary and commercial sectors, a review of existing literature and through consulting a range of key people in the field.

Overall, the bereavement care standards we identified were clinically focussed (e.g. for palliative care providers specifically) and there was a paucity of documents that related to the general community. As there were a limited number of bereavement care standards identified, and they were so diverse, it has been difficult to synthesise and summarise their key features. Consequently, the identified documents have been described according to their target audience: national, organisational, and community. The types of terminology used and their main features are listed below.

National Bereavement Care Standards

An example of national bereavement care standards are [Bereavement Care Service Standards](#) developed for the UK by the national organisations ‘Cruse Bereavement Care’ and the ‘Bereavement Services Association’. These were developed to be applied by any sector dealing with bereavement care including hospital, hospice, community, commercial and bereavement support organisations.

The national documents are generally very long and detailed (~30 pages), and aim to provide guidance for improving service provision via ‘standards’. These documents are generally referred to as standards and charters. Some key features include resource allocation, access, and systematic assessment of bereavement care services.

Organisational Bereavement Care Standards

An example of organisational bereavement care standards are [Bereavement support standards for specialist palliative care services](#) developed by the State Government of Victoria, which specifically apply to the professionals working in all Victorian government-funded, adult,

specialist palliative care services, including community, inpatient, acute and consultancy services. Organisational standards are fairly long (~10 pages) and generally provided guidance on how staff should perform within their roles. The documents are generally referred to the guidelines or principles. Some key features include coordination of service provision, and improving training and support.

Community Bereavement Care Standards

An example of community groups principles is the [Nottingham Child Health Organisations Principles Of Bereavement Care](#). These are principles that are applied to all areas of their community based organisation, including volunteers. The common terminology used for community bereavement care standards are principles, vision, mission, code of conduct, or code of ethics. The documents are generally short and sweet (~1-2 pages), and written in easily accessible wording. Some key features include the provision of ideal and unifying statements – e.g. ‘treating people with dignity’; every child is part of a family; privacy will be offered...

What is happening in Tasmania?

The Tasmanian Department of Health and Human Services have recently produced a comprehensive document [Discussion paper on bereavement care in Tasmania: current status and future directions](#). The purpose of this paper was to provide a snapshot of contemporary thinking about bereavement care and to prompt thinking about the future directions of bereavement care in Tasmania. The report provides an overview of current bereavement care options in Tasmania and identifies service and system level gaps reported by stakeholders working in the area.

Whilst currently there are no specific ‘bereavement care standards’ for Tasmania, the Tasmanian DHHS via the Better Access to Palliative Care initiative has recently consulted widely with the Tasmanian community to inform the development of the [Tasmanian Palliative Care Community Charter](#). The draft Charter encompasses key statements regarding bereavement care, which may be useful in informing the development of Bereavement Care Standards for Tasmania.

A recent evaluation of the “Walking Through Grief” program undertaken by Palliative Care Tasmania proposed that guidelines or a charter be developed for the Walking Through Grief program. They concluded that an important consideration when developing TAS specific standards may be:

‘That there should be some form of guidelines, though again, this should not be too long. In an attempt to remain “un-bureaucratic”, recommendations of no more than 1-2 pages were made. This charter should contain elements including respect, communication and confidentiality.’