

Cemeteries & Crematoria NSW

# Way to go

**People's views on burials,  
cremation, funerals and  
ways to commemorate life**

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August 2020







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# Planning for after-death: burial, cremation and funeral options

**Cemeteries & Crematoria NSW commissioned consulting company Urbis to undertake important research to improve awareness and encourage more people in NSW to plan for their burial, cremation and funeral arrangements.**

## The need to raise public awareness

In Australia, discussion surrounding death and planning for our burial, cremation or funerals is often considered to be very personal and not a part of our social discourse.

The rich diversity of the NSW community also means there is a wide range of needs and expectations when planning for death. Our state is home to more than 200 language groups, over 125 religious groups and some 300 ancestries.<sup>1</sup> The choice of what to do after a death can be strongly influenced by religion and culture as well as other personal beliefs and values. For example, some religious customs require burial only and do not allow cremation. At the same time, there is growing interest in environmentally sustainable options for dealing with the body after-death, as well as in more customised funerals.

A more death-aware society is one where people have the knowledge and confidence to plan well for after-death.<sup>2</sup> This means talking about planning for death, then building the knowledge, skills and confidence to take action. This research is a step towards understanding and increasing death awareness in NSW.

Our research identifies that many people in NSW make their death arrangements when they are at-need, that is when someone is ill or close to death. This can put enormous additional strain on a person and their loved ones and results in people making important decisions when under pressure. Normalising the conversation on planning for after-death arrangements, as well as providing people with clear and transparent information on burial, cremation and funeral options, may greatly reduce this pressure.

This report provides insights into the attitudes and behaviours that influence us to plan or not plan for after-death. It reports on primary research undertaken with people from across NSW and highlights how our values, views and attitudes towards death influence our ability to talk about and make plans for it.<sup>3</sup>

## Cemeteries & Crematoria NSW

Cemeteries & Crematoria NSW is the part of NSW Government that regulates cemeteries and crematoria and provides information on burial and cremation options to the public. It also holds a critical role in assessing cemetery space, and future burial and cremation demand in NSW.

**When we talk about planning for after-death in this report, we mean:**



Thinking about and talking to others about our choices for burial or cremation



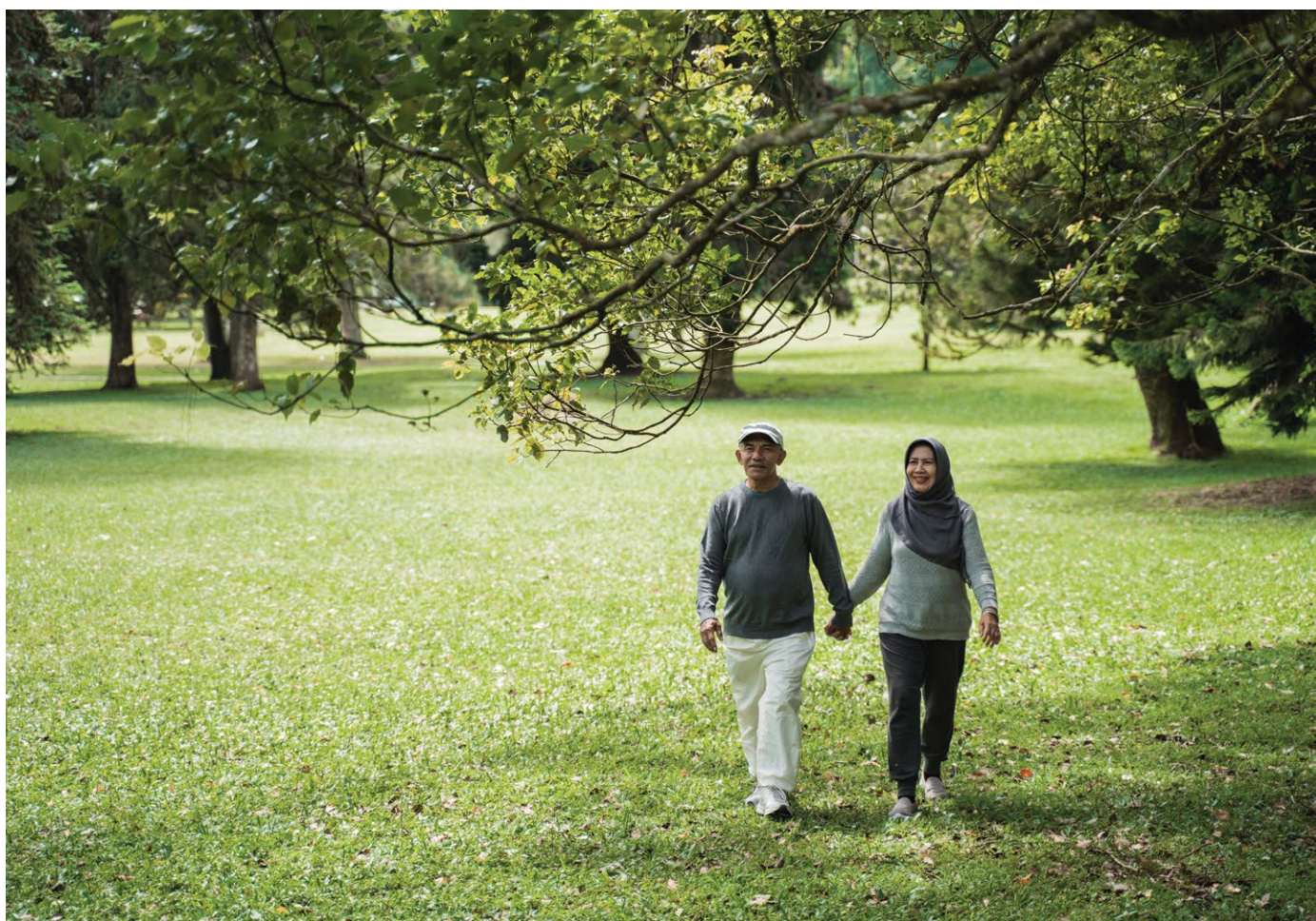
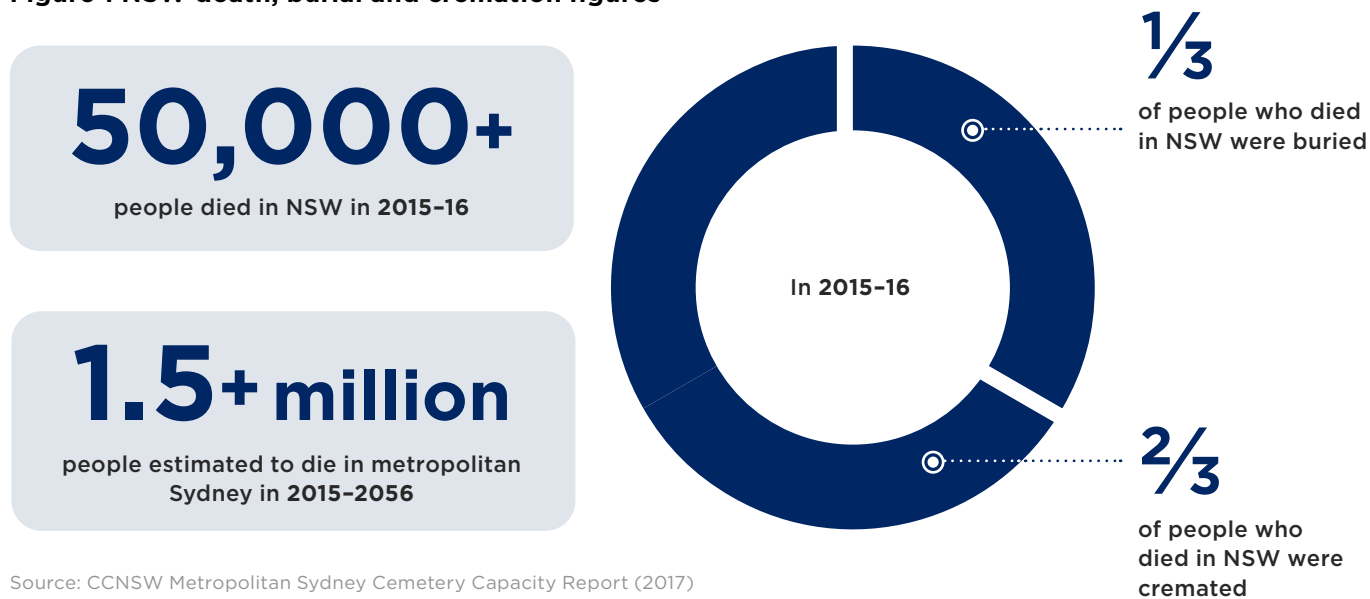
Planning for a funeral, including the more personal details

<sup>1</sup> ABS (2017) 3302.0 Deaths, Australia, accessed via id.the population experts [www.id.com.au](http://www.id.com.au)

<sup>2</sup> Noonan, Kerrie (2017) Death Literacy in Australia: The Groundswell Project, accessed via [www.palliativecarescotland.org.uk/content/publications/Kerrie-Noonan.pdf](http://www.palliativecarescotland.org.uk/content/publications/Kerrie-Noonan.pdf)

<sup>3</sup> This research was undertaken by Urbis on behalf of Cemeteries & Crematoria NSW. The research involved a cohort reflective of the NSW population at the 2016 Census, including age, gender and location. How we approached the research is covered in page 6 of this report.

Figure 1 NSW death, burial and cremation figures





# How we approached this research

This report provides an overview of the main attitudes and demographic characteristics that drive how we plan for our after-death arrangements.

## Key research activities

- 1 An attitudinal survey:** undertaken online by over 1,140 NSW residents, which was statistically representative of the NSW population for age, gender and location. The survey had slightly lower representation for people born outside of Australia, people speaking a language other than English at home, and people who identified as having a religion. Qualitative research (activities 3-5) was undertaken to counterbalance this.
- 2 Key informant interviews:** to understand the context of the problem, including perceptions, drivers and barriers surrounding after-death planning in NSW. Interviews were held with industry stakeholders across state and local government, cemetery and funeral providers, and consumer advocates.
- 3 Exploratory focus groups:** to provide in-depth insights into attitudes across six groups of people identified through the survey.
- 4 Stakeholder workshops:** involving industry, government, community and consumer stakeholders to discuss the key research findings and identify priorities for action through education and public awareness campaigns.
- 5 User testing focus groups:** with the six groups of people to help develop an appropriate education and public awareness strategy.

## Research limitations



### Survey

The survey results should be considered with the following limitations in mind:

- Opinions may be biased to those who participate in online panels and may not be representative of the whole population
- The mindset and knowledge of respondents will inherently reflect the end-of-life and funeral products and services that are currently available for after-death choices.



### Focus groups

The focus group results should be considered with the following limitations in mind:

- Opinions of respondents are based on those people who agreed to participate in the group and may not be representative of the whole population
- The number of participants in each focus group varied. Overall findings may be more representative of groups with a greater number of participants.

# How prepared are people in NSW for after-death?

**This section of the report highlights the main factors that influence people to plan or not plan for after-death. It indicates that most people in NSW are inadequately prepared for their after-death circumstances. This finding is consistent with national and international research.**

## Prompts for after-death planning

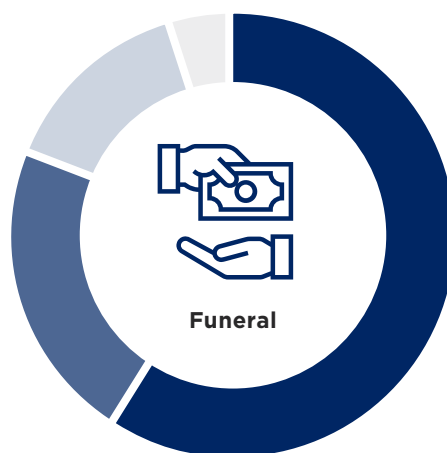
Our research with people in NSW showed that age, ethnicity and faith all have a part to play in influencing people's attitudes and behaviours towards planning for death. Gender and where people live, whether in urban, regional or rural parts of the state, also had some influence over people's actions.

Our research identified that many people struggled to know where to start in making their after-death choices.

But by far the biggest predictor in making plans for after-death is the experience of having a family member or close friend die and, more specifically, planning a funeral for a relative or friend. People who had these experiences were more likely to have then made plans for their own death arrangements.

Another important life event that prompted people to plan for after-death was making a will. In addition, a few people surveyed had pre-paid for their funeral.

In some cases, the research showed that people mistakenly believed that will-making covered decisions about planning for death. Making a will is a good prompt to plan and communicate your wishes for burial, cremation and ceremony. However, as a will is not usually read until after the funeral, nothing is better than making after-death plans early and communicating wishes to family or friends in advance.



- 59% have not pre-paid for their funeral
- 22% are unsure whether to pre-pay for their funeral
- 14% are planning to pre-pay for their funeral
- 5% have pre-paid for their funeral



- 59% have not made a will
- 42% have made a will

Totals may not add to 100% due to rounding.



**62%**

Have never made funeral arrangements for others

**38%**

Have made funeral arrangements for others

## Information source



**67%**

Would consult a funeral director



**46%**

Would search the internet for this information

# What shapes our planning for after-death?

## The attitudes that bind us

The research showed that there are some universal attitudes and beliefs about death that drive our behaviour in planning for it.

- Not leaving a burden for family was significant in influencing people to plan for their death.
- People sometimes think about death and dying and believe we should be discussing this more.
- Funerals are an important opportunity to farewell a person, but people have generally not thought about their own funeral.
- There is concern and confusion regarding the cost of a funeral and burial or cremation.
- People are keen to have an independent source to compare prices and choices relating to burial or cremation.
- Prompts to plan include illness, death of a loved one, planning a funeral for another person, discussions with family or friends, and ageing relatives.
- Barriers to planning include fear of talking about death, apathy (including thinking death is a long way off), not knowing how to start a conversation, transient lifestyle, and lack of close family or friends.
- Very few people had pre-paid or considered pre-paying for their funeral arrangements.

There were also a number of widely held views about cemeteries as a land use and options for the disposal of bodily remains beyond conventional burial and cremation.

- Most people believed conventional burial and cremation are the only options available to them and based on this, hold a strong preference for cremation over burial.
- Some people had strong environmental concerns about the disposal of bodily remains.
- There was low awareness yet strong interest in new and re-emerging options for funerals and body disposal.
- People were generally ambivalent towards cemeteries as a land use but do feel that the needs of a range of cultural and religious beliefs, including secular values, should be accommodated in our cities and towns.
- Cemeteries were generally considered an important part of a city or town's open space.

## The attitudes that make us different

The statewide survey showed that our behaviours diverge due to a number of attitudinal factors. These include our:

- Comfort discussing and thinking about death and dying
- Strength of family influence
- Intent to plan for our burial or cremation
- Importance of tradition
- Importance of religion
- Preferences for cremation or burial
- Support for cemeteries as land use
- Comfort with body disposal options beyond conventional burial or cremation.



# Public attitudes towards planning for after-death: six profiles

## Different attitudes to after-death planning

Based on our survey research, six different groups of people were identified according to their attitudes towards planning for after-death. These groups are outlined below and are profiled in this chapter. The chapter begins with an overview of these groups and the attitudes that influence their planning for after-death. Each individual group profile is ordered from those most likely to plan to those who are least likely to plan for after-death.

According to the research, each of these groups is roughly similar in size, representing between 13-16% of respondents, with the exception of the 'Apprehensive or in denial' segment, which is around double the size at 28% of respondents.



**1. Pragmatic and prepared**



**2. Religion is important**



**3. Not a priority right now**



**4. Uninitiated**



**5. Apprehensive or in denial**

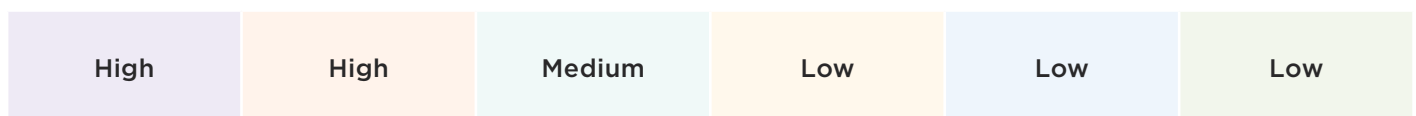


**6. Easy-going progressives**

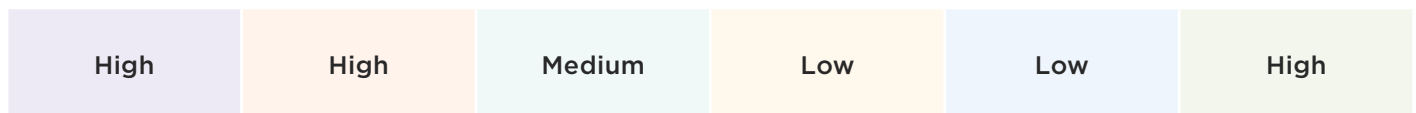
# The main attitudes that inform planning for after-death



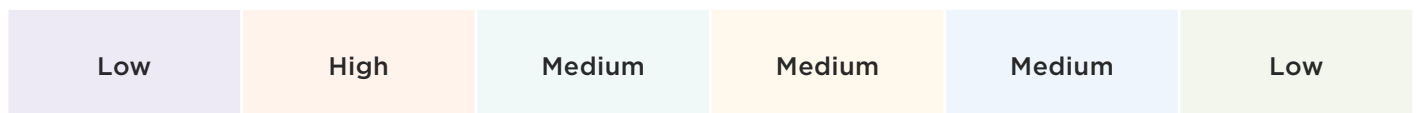
## Intent to plan



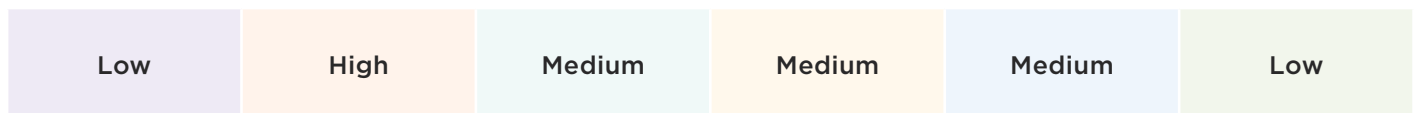
## Comfort with death



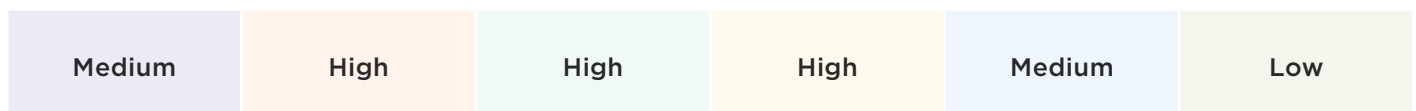
## Importance of tradition



## Influence of religion



## Family influence





## Pragmatic & prepared

14% of respondents



Strong preference for cremation

62%

Have a will

61%

Have been involved in making funeral arrangements

Most prepared of all segments about their death



Comfortable talking about death and dying



Have experience planning a funeral



Have discussed their wishes with family or friends



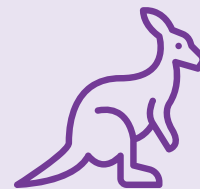
Do not want any religious elements to their funeral



A larger proportion are male



Slightly older demographic, almost half are 55 or older



More than half live outside of Sydney

### Gender

Male 57%

Female 43%

### Location

In Sydney 45%

Outside Sydney 55%

### Age

34 or younger 13%

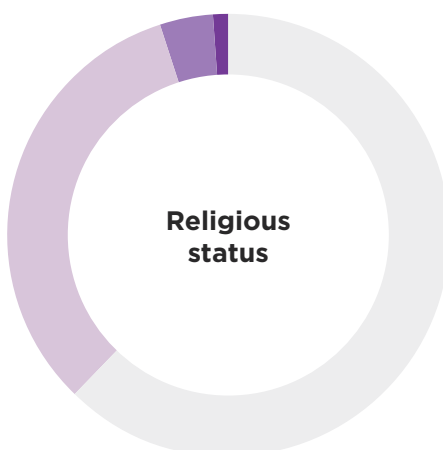
35 to 54 38%

55 or older 49%

### Cultural diversity

Born in Australia 84%

Born overseas 15%



5%

Speak a language other than English at home

- 63% are not religious
- 33% religious (practising)
- 4% religious (not practising)
- 1% prefer not to say

Totals may not add to 100% due to rounding.

### Key attitudes

Agree	Disagree
My family are aware of my wishes when I die.	I don't have a preference on what happens to my body after I die.
I would prefer to be cremated rather than buried.	I would prefer to be buried rather than cremated.
I do not want any religious elements in my funeral ceremony.	I would like a religious funeral ceremony.





## Religion is important

15% of respondents



General preference for cremation

61%

Have a will

55%

Have been involved in making funeral arrangements

Strong preference for a religious and traditional funeral



Comfortable talking about death and dying



Have intentions to plan for their death



View funeral ceremonies as an important way to remember loved ones



Family has a high influence on planning for after-death



More than half have been involved in planning a funeral



Slightly older age group



Most are religious and actively practising



Born in Australia and live in metropolitan areas

### Gender

Male 51%

Female 49%

### Location

In Sydney 69%

Outside Sydney 31%

### Age

34 or younger 21%

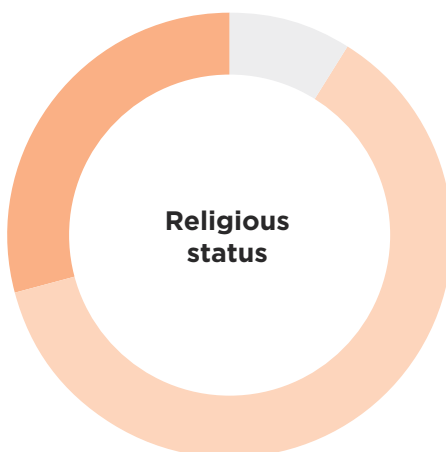
35 to 54 36%

55 or older 43%

### Cultural diversity

Born in Australia 82%

Born overseas 18%



Religious status

15%

Speak a language other than English at home

9% are not religious

62% religious (practising)

29% religious (not practising)

Totals may not add to 100% due to rounding.

### Key attitudes



Agree



Disagree

I would like a religious funeral ceremony.

I do not want any religious elements in my funeral ceremony.

My religious or spiritual beliefs or cultural traditions will have a significant impact on how I am laid to rest.

I don't think that there is a need for a ceremony, such as a funeral, when a person dies.

It is important that I have a traditional funeral ceremony.

The thought of attending a funeral makes me feel uncomfortable.

I feel very comfortable talking about death.

I think that funerals are an important opportunity to remember a loved one.



## Not a priority right now

13% of respondents



Slight preference for cremation over burial

42%

Have a will

37%

Have been involved in making funeral arrangements



Find it difficult to acknowledge their mortality



High importance on family and worry about the financial burden of planning a funeral on their family



Strong support for cemeteries as a land use



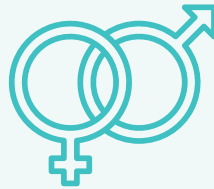
Supportive of alternative methods of burial or cremation



Majority have never been involved with planning a funeral before



Have a strong environmental focus



Even split male and female, mostly middle aged



Most live in metropolitan areas



Larger proportion born overseas, compared to other groups

### Gender

Male 51%

Female 49%

### Location

In Sydney 59%

Outside Sydney 41%

### Age

34 or younger 37%

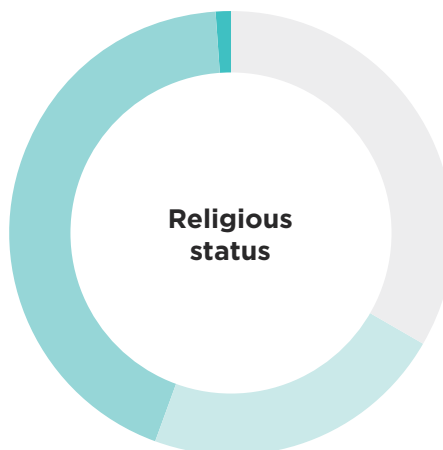
35 to 54 36%

55 or older 27%

### Cultural diversity

Born in Australia 67%

Born overseas 33%



23% Speak a language other than English at home

- 33% are not religious
- 22% religious (practising)
- 43% religious (not practising)
- 1% prefer not to say

Totals may not add to 100% due to rounding.

### Key attitudes

Agree	
I have a place in mind where I would like to be laid to rest after I pass away.	Funeral arrangements should mostly be managed by professionals such as funeral directors and celebrants rather than family.
When I die, it is important that I am laid to rest with my loved ones.	I find it difficult to acknowledge the reality of death.
I would never discuss funeral arrangements with my loved ones before it is necessary.	I don't think laws and regulations should restrict what happens to my body once I die.
I worry that having to pay for my funeral could put my loved ones under financial stress.	



## Uninitiated

16% of respondents



No clear preference on cremation or burial

18%

Have a will

24%

Have been involved in making funeral arrangements

The least planned of all segments regarding their burial or cremation



Find it difficult acknowledging the reality of death and talking about death or dying



Have not thought about what their funeral would look like



Family has a strong influence on planning for after-death



Most have never been involved with planning a funeral



Mostly female



Youngest age group



Live in metropolitan areas

### Gender

Male 26%

Female 74%

### Location

In Sydney 62%

Outside Sydney 38%

### Age

34 or younger 49%

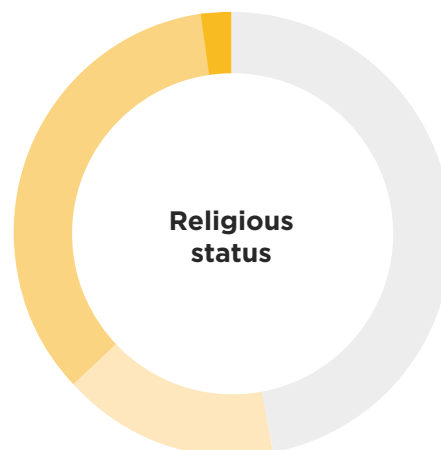
35 to 54 39%

55 or older 11%

### Cultural diversity

Born in Australia 78%

Born overseas 22%



18%

Speak a language other than English at home

- 47% are not religious
- 16% religious (practising)
- 35% religious (not practising)
- 2% prefer not to say

Totals may not add to 100% due to rounding.

### Key attitudes

Agree	Disagree
I find it difficult to acknowledge the reality of death.	My family are aware of my wishes when I die.
It is important for people to have a final resting place where loved ones can visit.	I have a sense of what my funeral is likely to look like.
	I feel very comfortable talking about death.





## Apprehensive or in denial

28% of respondents



No clear preference on cremation or burial

**34%**

Have a will

**28%**

Have been involved in making funeral arrangements



Quite uncomfortable talking about death or dying



Have not thought about their burial or cremation



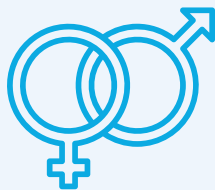
Find it difficult to think about their own mortality



Low support for cemeteries as a land use



Most have never been involved with planning a funeral



Similar proportions of male and female

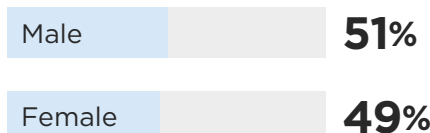


Middle age group



Most live in metropolitan areas

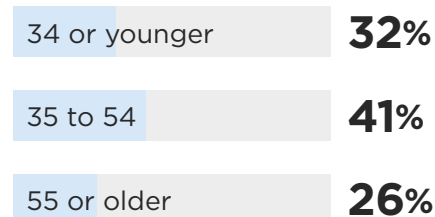
### Gender



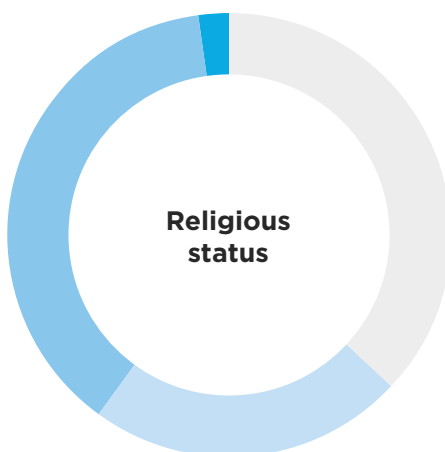
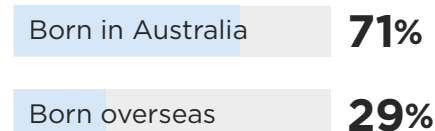
### Location



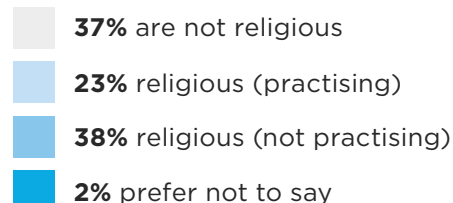
### Age



### Cultural diversity



**23%** Speak a language other than English at home



Totals may not add to 100% due to rounding.

### Key attitudes

Disagree	
After I die, I would like my body to be handled in a way that doesn't negatively impact on the environment.	There should be affordable and accessible alternatives to traditional cemeteries.
We should be talking more about death and dying.	I sometimes think about my own mortality.
Cemeteries should be able to cater for a range of cultural and religious beliefs.	I think that funerals are an important opportunity to remember a loved one.



## Easy-going progressives

15% of respondents



Strong preference for cremation over burial

48%

Have a will

37%

Have been involved in making funeral arrangements

Don't want religious or traditional elements in their ceremony



Very comfortable talking about death and dying



Little preference to what happens to their body once they die



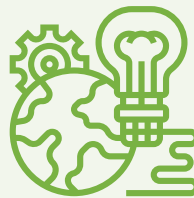
Low levels of planning for their death



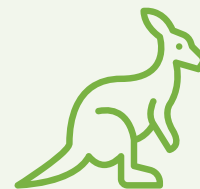
Have a strong environmental focus



Slightly older age group, largely male



Most are not religious



Many live in regional/rural areas, compared to other groups

### Gender

Male 62%

Female 38%

### Location

In Sydney 52%

Outside Sydney 48%

### Age

34 or younger 29%

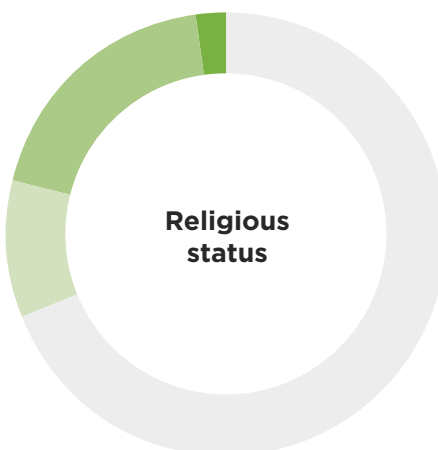
35 to 54 28%

55 or older 44%

### Cultural diversity

Born in Australia 73%

Born overseas 27%



8%

Speak a language other than English at home

- 69% are not religious
- 10% religious (practising)
- 19% religious (not practising)
- 2% prefer not to say

Totals may not add to 100% due to rounding.

### Key attitudes

Agree	Disagree
I don't have a preference about what happens to my body after I die.	I would like a religious funeral ceremony.
I do not want any religious elements in my funeral ceremony.	It is important that I have a traditional funeral ceremony.
I am comfortable with the thought of my remains being moved many decades after I die so that my grave plot could be re-used by people whom I don't know.	My religious or spiritual beliefs or cultural traditions will have a significant impact on how I am laid to rest.
I feel very comfortable talking about death.	

# Starting to plan for after-death

**This research, commissioned by Cemeteries & Crematoria NSW and conducted by Urbis, highlights a number of values, views and attitudes that influence us to plan or not plan for after-death – both what happens to our bodies when we die and how we would like our lives to be remembered.**

The research showed that many people in NSW make their death arrangements when they are at-need, that is when they are ill or close to death. This can put enormous additional strain on a person and their loved ones and result in people making important decisions when under pressure. This is consistent with national and international data.

The research was undertaken to inform strategies for education and public awareness to assist Cemeteries & Crematoria NSW to provide people with clear and transparent information on options, and normalise the conversation on planning for after-death arrangements.

A more death-aware society is one where people have the knowledge and confidence to plan well for after-death. Cemeteries & Crematoria NSW is preparing a range of resources to support earlier planning by NSW's consumers and families.



For resources to help plan after-death arrangements, visit the Cemeteries & Crematoria NSW webpage: [dpie.nsw.gov.au/cemeteries-crematoria](https://dpie.nsw.gov.au/cemeteries-crematoria)

Here you will find factsheets, checklists and supporting information to help you, a friend or family member in planning for after-death arrangements.



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