



CREATING YOUR LEGACY

A COMPASSIONATE GUIDE
TO LEGACY PLANNING

IT'S YOUR LIFE. IT'S YOUR CHOICE.

**DYING WITH
DIGNITY**
CANADA



**PANCREATIC
CANCER
NORTH AMERICA**



This legacy planning guide is a joint initiative by **Dying With Dignity Canada** and **Pancreatic Cancer North America**.

What is legacy planning?

Legacy planning is the process of transforming reflections and memories into meaningful action, taking time to purposefully create something lasting for yourself and the people you love and care about.

Legacy is often thought of as what you leave behind and how you are remembered after you are gone. But a true legacy is built in the context of a life that has been lived. It is shaped by your beliefs, values, traditions, stories, knowledge, and skills, and by the ways you have impacted those around you. It allows you to preserve what matters most to you through the creation of a narrative surrounding your lived experiences.

Legacy planning is about deciding what you want to leave behind and creating something meaningful that carries part of you forward. It is the act of shaping what remains in memories, lives, hearts, and in the world. It offers an opportunity to reflect on your life, express what matters to you, and provide something lasting to the people you care about. There are no rules or restrictions, nor are there limitations or eligibility criteria—only the opportunity to leave behind something that feels true to who you are.

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BENEFITS OF LEGACY PLANNING

Receiving a life-limiting or terminal diagnosis can be overwhelming, often bringing feelings of fear, loss, and powerlessness. Yet, for many, it can also prompt a period of reflection, an opportunity to pause and consider the impact of one's life. Legacy planning is a way to bring structure and intention to this experience. It can support a sense of agency, autonomy, choice, and control during a time when so much may feel out of your hands. This can create a level of relief and purpose as well as a focused and meaningful way to navigate this uncertain time.

Legacy planning can support the grieving process, both your own and that of your loved ones. It provides a space to process complex emotions, bridge the connection between mind and body, and offer opportunities for emotional expression. Knowing that a piece of your life and identity will continue in a tangible way can bring a sense of peace and fulfillment.

In addition, legacy planning is a tool for empowerment, cultural expression, and social connection. It allows you to honour your heritage, articulate your values, and pass on traditions and stories in a way that strengthens bonds and fosters shared meaning. As you reflect on your hopes, fears, and priorities, legacy planning can deepen your relationships with yourself, your life and your loved ones, while helping you reclaim ownership of your story.

TYPES OF LEGACY BUILDING

There are two primary types of legacy building:

Intentional legacy building

This involves intentionally crafting the legacy you wish to leave behind by making thoughtful, proactive decisions. It is a purposeful approach to ensuring that your legacy reflects your values, priorities, and how you want to be remembered. Examples of intentional legacy building include:



TANGIBLE LEGACY ITEMS

- Keepsake items such as memory boxes and handmade gifts
- Art, jewelry, or music created for loved ones
- Photo albums or memory scrapbooks

LIVING LEGACY PROJECTS

- Journaling or letter-writing
- Scrapbooks or oral storytelling
- Video diaries or digital storytelling
- Blogs or social media projects led by the individual

Incidental legacy building

Incidental legacy building occurs naturally, without intentional planning, because of choices, relationships, and actions that have shaped your life. It reflects how your life story influences others organically, even without a formal or structured plan.

This includes being remembered for the way you made others feel in your presence and by your actions; for example, passing down family traditions or recipes that have become part of your loved ones' lives without you having intentionally planned it.

IMPLEMENTATION OF YOUR LEGACY PLAN

If you require support in the creation of your legacy plan, it is important to ensure that your support network understands and embraces your vision and how you would like it to be carried out. Consider initiating open, meaningful conversations with trusted individuals, including loved ones and care providers, to share your intentions and invite connection.

Consider the following:

- Sharing your vision and the reasons behind your decisions
- Involving others in the process when it feels right to help foster a sense of shared purpose, understanding, and connection
- Creating space to discuss any concerns that loved ones may have about carrying out or completing your legacy plan
- Seeking professional support when required. Supports could include death doulas, social workers, psychologists, online support services, or patient navigation programs

CONSIDERATIONS WHEN THINKING ABOUT LEGACY PLANNING

Legacy planning begins with thoughtful reflection about you and your life, who you are, what matters to you, and how you want to be remembered. By exploring your legacy from a personal, familial, and societal perspective, it allows you to craft a legacy project or plan that feels authentic, meaningful, and true to your values.

1. What do I want my legacy to reflect?

- What core values do I want to be remembered for?
- Are there lessons or wisdom that I want to pass on to future generations?

2. How can I contribute to the well-being of others?

- How can I positively impact the lives of the people closest to me?
- How can my loved ones live more fulfilling lives?

3. What family traditions or cultural practices do I want to preserve?

- Are there any customs, stories, or rituals that I want to ensure will continue after I'm gone?
- Do I want to record family history or personal stories to help future generations understand our heritage?

4. How can I make a lasting impact or impression on the world?

- Are there causes or issues that I can advocate for or contribute to in a meaningful way?
- What kind of environmental or social impact do I wish to leave behind?



5. What relationships do I want to nurture or strengthen?

- Are there any relationships I want to cultivate more deeply?
- Are there any unresolved conflicts or relationships I want to mend?

6. How will I share my experiences and life lessons?

- Do I want to document messages to loved ones to help guide them in the future?
- Should I create a personal memoir to share my thoughts and reflections?

7. What impact do I want to have on future generations?

- How do I want to influence future generations (either family or broader society)?
- How can I set a foundation for future generations to thrive in their own lives?

8. How can I leave behind a legacy of joy and positivity?

- What moments of happiness do I want to share with others?
- How can I spread kindness, optimism, and laughter to create an environment that others remember fondly?

EXAMPLES OF LEGACY ACTIVITIES

As with many projects, legacy planning may feel overwhelming, but taking the first step is the most challenging part. Whatever form your legacy takes, it will become a lasting reflection and extension of who you are, one that your loved ones will cherish. The list below is meant to inspire and guide you as you begin to create something personal and meaningful.

Storytelling activities:

Storytelling is a powerful tool to build identity, process emotions like grief, and foster empathy amongst others. For those facing a life-limiting or terminal illness, this type of legacy activity can offer a meaningful way to reflect, share wisdom, and strengthen a sense of dignity and purpose. Storytelling also fosters empathy and connection.

Consider the following:

- Creating a recipe book/collection of your favourite family recipes
- Recording a video diary recalling memorable highlights, challenges, or special moments from your life, or sharing your best advice, family history, etc.
- Recording video and/or audio interviews with family
- Creating an email account for a loved one and sending emails that they can read at different stages of their future life
- Maintaining a journal about your life experiences
- Completing a life review worksheet/workbook



Creative activities:

Storytelling is a powerful tool to build identity, process emotions like grief, and foster empathy amongst others. For those facing a life-limiting or terminal illness, this type of legacy activity can offer a meaningful way to reflect, share wisdom, and strengthen a sense of dignity and purpose. Storytelling also fosters empathy and connection.

Consider the following:

- Making art for loved ones
- Building a scrapbook of pictures and keepsakes related to memorable times in your life
- Using polymer clay/plaster to make keepsake tokens such as hand/fingerprints
- Creating playlists of favorite songs or hymns
- Creating a blanket made from your favourite T-shirts or other fabric items
- Writing poems or songs specifically for your loved ones



Familial activities and being part of special milestones after death:

While everyone's relationships with their families or loved ones are unique, a shared project can be a meaningful way to connect and create lasting memories. Shared activities can contribute to a sense of belonging, security, and offer space for joyful, meaningful interactions, even during anticipatory grief.

Consider the following:

- Taking a trip with loved ones and commemorating your time together with pictures of the trip or a special souvenir
- Starting a tradition (ex. monthly game night) or commemorate a tradition that has always been special to you and your loved ones

- Planting a tree or build a garden together
- Writing letters or prepare small gifts to be opened at future special occasions (graduations, weddings, etc.)
- Creating a “memory box” full of special mementos from milestones or quiet everyday moments that you shared with your loved ones
- Recording yourself singing lullabies, happy birthday, or other special songs

Family history activity prompts:

Preserving family history is an important way to share your story and ensure personal details are not lost over time. For those facing a life-limiting or terminal illness, it offers an opportunity to document genealogical history, personal milestones and family traditions, creating a lasting resource for future generations.

Consider the following:

- To when/where can my family’s roots be traced? How many generations can be tracked?
- Who are the family’s founding members? What are their stories?
- Who is currently the oldest living relative? And the youngest?
- How many families are there in the current generation?
- What city were you born in? In what year?
- How many siblings do you have? Are you older or younger?
- What were your parents like when you were growing up?
- How much did your first car cost? Your first house?
- What year did you get married? What kind of wedding did you have?
- How has the world changed since you were young?

CONCLUSION

Legacy planning is not just about preparing for what is to come, it is about celebrating who you are, honouring your relationships, and giving voice to what matters most to you. This is a deeply personal process, and there is no one correct way to do it. Whether through stories, creativity, shared memories, or a quiet reflection, the impact of your life and your legacy will be a lasting expression and reminder of your values, love, and life.

We hope this guide has helped you begin the legacy planning process with clarity and care. Whatever you choose, know that your impact will live on in the hearts and lives of those who know and love you.



If you need support, please reach out to:

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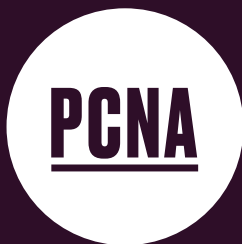
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