

Before Death Checklist

The Before Death Checklist was created to help you in considering important matters to address before you or a loved one passes away. Nobody wants to think about or plan for death, yet failing to do so can leave your surviving loved ones burdened with confusion, stress, and worry, all while grieving a loss. Planning ahead and getting your affairs in order is a wonderful gift to those who will be responsible for settling your final affairs, but most people are unsure of where to begin. Allow this checklist to serve as a guide to you.

□ **Execute a Will and/or Trust.**

The primary purpose of a will is to ensure that you have control over how your assets are managed and distributed after you die. A will allows you to express your desires for your estate and guarantees that your wishes are carried out. Failure to create a will leaves the allocation of assets in the hands of your state's intestate laws

There are different ways to create and have a will prepared, ranging from the conventional approach of consulting with an attorney to the more modern option of utilizing online will drafting platforms (such as Trust & Will or Legal Zoom), or just simply handwriting your will. Whichever option you choose, make certain that your will complies with your state's laws and standards for a valid will.

Once your will is created, be sure to store the original in a secure location, such as a safe deposit box. Further, and most importantly, inform the person you will be designating as the executor of your estate (the person you pick to manage your final affairs in your will), and any other important persons, regarding the placement of the Will. If your will cannot be found, it is of no effect or use.

Another estate planning tool that can be utilized is a trust. Similar to a will, you use a trust to ensure you have control over how your assets are managed and distributed upon your death. However, a trust is drastically different than a will in that you can use it to avoid probate, use it during your lifetime and during times of incapacity, and other benefits. When using a trust, the most important element in making sure it can be used is making sure it is properly funded. Funded means titling your assets into the name of your trust.

If you are unsure whether a will or trust is your best option, you should consult with an estate planning attorney.

□ **Make Funeral/Cremation Arrangements.**

Set up the funeral / cremation plans in advance, and pre-pay all costs if possible. This will take some of the pressure off of your family in deciding what plans to make and how to pay for them. By making your own funeral/cremation arrangements, you remain in control on how your life will be memorialized.

You can organize your funeral/cremation arrangements by contacting a funeral home of your choosing and setting up the plans that best suit your preferences, needs, and budget. Once your funeral/cremation plans are finalized, notify your executor and any other key individuals so they know where your funeral/cremation plans will be handled upon your death.

□ **Write your Obituary.**

By writing your own obituary, you have the ability to exert control over the information that is written and shared about your life. There are a variety of obituary writing tools and templates available online that can help get you started. Once your obituary has been prepared to your satisfaction, you should store the information in a secure location and inform your executor and any other important persons of the location of the material so it can be easily accessed when needed.

□ **Prepare a List of Contacts.**

Make a list of the people who should be notified of your death and your funeral arrangements in the event of your death. The list should include full names and contact information (phone number, email address, and / or home address). This will help avoid the risk of leaving anyone out. Keep this list alongside your other important documents and in a location that your executor and other important persons know about.

□ **Compile a List of Companies to Notify of Death.**

Prepare a list of the different institutions that will need to be notified of your death, such as banks, social security department, utility companies, phone company, and creditors. Be sure to provide specific information, such as the entity names, contact information, and the services they provide. Store this information with your other important documents and inform your executor and other important persons of its location.

□ **Compile a List of Death Benefits.**

Put together a list of death benefits and insurance policies for your beneficiaries. This will be helpful when trying to determine what companies need to be notified of your death and furnished with claim forms. You will want to store this information with your other important forms and inform your executor and other important persons of its location.

□ **Compile a List of Assets.**

Make a detailed and comprehensive inventory list of all of your assets (both of physical items - such as jewelry and other household items, and non-physical - such as bank accounts and life insurance policies). One of most stressful jobs of an executor is determining what assets a deceased person possessed and acting as an investigator into someone else's financial affairs. Having this information available will save your executor

a significant amount of time and stress. Keep this information with your other important documents and inform your executor and other important persons of its location.

Compile a List of Debts.

Prepare a complete list of all of your debts, including mortgages, utilities, loans, credit cards, medical bills, and any other liability of which you owe. Having this information on hand will assist your executor in determining whether your estate is solvent, which debts must be satisfied, and who should be contacted when it comes time to settle your estate. Store this information with your other important documents and inform your executor and other important persons of its location.

Gather Important Documents.

Collect all of your important records and papers, such as your will, trust, property deeds, vehicle titles, insurance policies, stock certificates, bonds, original certificates (death, birth, marriage, etc.), contact information for your attorney and tax preparer, and anything else of importance and store in a secure location. You should inform your executor and other important persons of the location of the documents.

Review Beneficiary Information.

Take time to examine the beneficiary appointments on your retirement account(s), life insurance policies, and any other beneficiary designated accounts to make sure your current wishes are reflected and information is up to date. The beneficiary information should be updated if a named beneficiary has died or if the beneficiary named is no longer the person you wish to list as a beneficiary.

Protect Digital Assets.

In today's world, it is common for the majority of your assets and information to be stored and maintained electronically. For this reason, you will want to be sure that all of your digital asset information is shared with your executor and important persons, including types of digital assets and log-in information. Your phone, computer, electronic banking, social media accounts, shopping accounts, websites, blogs, and other online activity are all examples of digital assets. Provide your executor and other important persons with this information so that your digital assets can be accessed and secured without complications upon your death.

Prepare a Financial Power of Attorney and Medical Documents.

In the event that you are unable to make decisions for yourself or communicate, you should have a financial power of attorney, healthcare power of attorney, living will, and HIPAA authorization. Each of these documents allow you to designate and appoint a person of your choice to act on your behalf in the manner outlined in each document. Similar to the preparation options of a will, you can have these documents drawn up by an attorney or

utilize online platforms. Failing to have these documents in place in times of incapacity could require the courts to step in and appoint someone for you and require continual court oversight, all of this is very time-consuming and costly.

□ **Provide the Location of Important Documents.**

This has already been noted throughout this checklist, but it is vital that you inform and advise your executor and other important persons concerning the location of all of your important documents. If you have documents stored in multiple locations, create a list of the locations of all of your documents and provide the list to your executor and other important persons.

This is not an exhaustive list, but it gives you a general sense of things to get in order before your demise. As you can see, by getting your affairs in order you retain control over your affairs and how your estate is settled. We hope you find this checklist useful as you give your family one of the greatest gifts – peace of mind.

www.Probatem.com

