

Plain language brief summary

Brief summary

The death of a baby in pregnancy or soon after birth is highly distressing for parents and families/whānau. It is vital that parents receive the best possible care. This 2024 update of the *Care Around Stillbirth and Neonatal Death Clinical Practice Guideline* for Australia and Aotearoa New Zealand helps healthcare professionals provide that care. The guideline is for healthcare professionals in maternal and newborn services, including hospitals and community services. It contains the latest evidence about the best possible care for parents and families/whānau around stillbirth, newborn death, and termination of pregnancy when there is a life-limiting condition for baby or mother.

Care begins at diagnosis, continues through pregnancy to birth, postnatal care and longer-term support including next pregnancies. Six core goals for respectful and supportive care of bereaved parents and families/whānau underpin the guideline. These are:

- good communication defined by empathy and compassion
- recognition of parenthood and care practices that respect and honour the baby and affirm identity as a parent
- cultural safety where healthcare professionals respond to the diverse needs, beliefs, and practices that are important to parents and families/whānau
- effective support in the immediate and longer-term that includes physical, emotional, and social aspects
- parent-centred decision making where parents receive support and information to be involved in decisions and to explore different options
- organisational enablers where organisations support healthcare professionals to provide the best possible care.

The guideline sets out clear recommendations for:

- perinatal loss care that responds to the individual needs of parents and families/whānau and supports their decision-making
- perinatal palliative care that supports the needs of parents whose baby has a life-limiting condition
- investigations for perinatal death to help parents understand why their baby died, including supporting parents to make decisions about the type of investigation that is right for them and their baby
- perinatal mortality audit including classifications to provide information for prevention and future care in maternal and newborn services
- care in subsequent pregnancies that recognises the concerns many parents may have
- organisational responsibilities to support a service-wide approach to best practice care that includes training and support for all staff.

Resources for putting the recommendations in place include a parent version of the guideline, guidance for audit and research activities, and information to support decisions about investigations. The Centre of Research Excellence in Stillbirth and Perinatal Society of Australia and New Zealand developed the guideline with extensive input from bereaved parents, healthcare professionals, researchers, and policy makers.