

# Point of Care Guidelines for Supporting First Nations Parents After Pregnancy Loss or Stillbirth

This document guides clinical staff to ensure culturally safe, trauma-informed, and respectful care for First Nations parents experiencing pregnancy loss at any gestation. It has been co-produced with families with lived experience to reflect their voices, values, and needs.

## Initial Contact & Acknowledgment of Loss

- Use clear, compassionate language: *"I am sorry for your loss. How would you like us to support you?"*
- Recognise that "Sorry Business" involves collective grieving.
  - ◊ **Tip:** Ask, *"Who would you like us to call or in the room? Would you like us to arrange a space for extended family to gather?"*
- Use and mirror the parents' preferred terms for their baby and loss (e.g., "sorry baby," "star baby").
  - ◊ **Tip:** Reflect the language used by the parents. Ask the parents how you like you to refer to the baby.

## Engaging Immediate Support

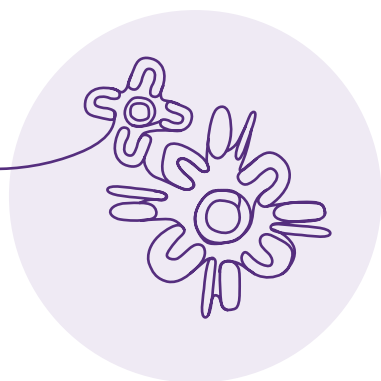
- Offer support from AHLOs, AHWs, Elders, or other cultural personnel, without presumption.
  - ◊ **Tip:** Do not assume cultural support is wanted especially in small communities where privacy may be preferred.
- Respect families' decision to decline cultural support.
  - ◊ **Tip:** Offer non-cultural support options like pastoral care or social workers.
- Contact the relevant department within the local ACCHO maternity or family service.
  - ◊ **Tip:** Ensure the correct program or person is notified to avoid delays in care.

## During Care – Decision-Making & Cultural Practices

- Respect collective decision-making; ask, *"Who would you like to be part of this conversation?"*
- Identify any gender preferences for staff involved.
  - ◊ **Tip:** Include gender preference on admission/ care planning forms.
- Provide large rooms for extended families.
- Ask before touching the baby or taking photographs.
- Provide private space for grieving practices or ceremonies.
  - ◊ **Tip:** If no bereavement room is available, use a room away from birthing mothers. Remove birth-related imagery.
- Allow time with the baby for rituals or smoking ceremonies.
  - ◊ **Tip:** Clearly communicate time limits if necessary, and support parents in using this time fully.
  - ◊ **Tip:** Some cultural rituals are gender-specific—ensure fathers or elders are given space to perform their role.

## Memory-Making & Autopsy Discussions

- Offer keepsakes: hand/footprints, locks of hair, memory cards, baby clothes.
  - ◊ **Resource:** Use Red Nose Treasured Baby service and birth card.
- Discuss autopsy with cultural sensitivity.
  - ◊ *"Autopsy is optional. You may decline or choose a partial one."*
  - ◊ **Tip:** Use visual aids or laminated diagrams to explain procedures.
  - ◊ **Tip:** Provide a direct contact person and number for parents seeking updates.
  - ◊ **Tip:** Accommodate requests for symbolic items like soil to stay with the baby.
- Offer alternatives like placenta or genetic testing if autopsy is declined.



## Funeral, Burial & Returning to Country

- Ask about funeral/burial preferences, including returning baby to Country.
- Provide support information for transport and funeral costs.
  - ◊ Resource: Handouts with Centrelink info and funeral services.
- Include parents in all transport and burial planning.
  - ◊ Tip: Provide a visual step-by-step checklist outlining the process.

## Handover & Continuing Care Coordination

- With consent, refer to:
  - ◊ Red Nose Bereavement Services
  - ◊ Local ACCHO, or GP
- If returning to a remote community: Acknowledge service limitations. Offer support through scheduled telehealth appointments and summaries
- Clearly outline who will contact them, when, and how.
  - ◊ Resource: Family handout with a clear referral timeline and contact names.
- Share key support contacts:
  - ◊ **Red Nose 24/7 Support Line:** 1300 308 307
  - ◊ Local ACCHO contact list
  - ◊ Peer support connections
- Final Considerations for Cultural Safety & Trauma-Informed Care
- Let parents guide the conversation and pace.
- Allow silence, recognising that grief is not always verbal.
- Respect different grieving styles.
- Acknowledge that past trauma (e.g., Stolen Generations, discrimination) may impact trust.
- Always ask permission before sharing any information.



**By following these guidelines in a stepwise, trauma-informed approach, clinical staff can deliver culturally respectful and compassionate care to First Nations families following the loss of a baby.**

