

Life and death decisions

YOU might not be prepared for life, but you can certainly plan your own death.

After all, we only live – and die – once.

Dying to Know Day, held on August 8, is a nationwide campaign aimed at starting a conversation about end-of-life care, death and loss.

There is a gradual change in how we view death and more openness towards its inevitability.

“Many people want to remember and celebrate a life, rather than mainly mourning a death,” Australian Funeral Directors Association junior vice-president Adrian Barrett said.

The national funeral service organisation has just conducted a survey on the wishes of loved ones once a person has died.

They found more people are opting for a less traditional and religious funeral, towards a more personalised service.

Furthermore, the percentage of Australians identifying as Christian fell from 88 per cent in 1968, to 30 per cent in 2018.

Thirty per cent of



TIME TO ACT: Dying to Know Day, or D2KDay, is a grassroots campaign aimed at encouraging people to talk about end-of-life and its planning. The day will be held on August 8. To find or host an event, go to dyingtoknowday.org.

Australians do not identify with any religion.

“The move away from traditional funerals shows our society has become more secular,” Mr Barrett said.

Funeral directors across

the country are noticing more people are opting for services to be conducted in alternative venues, such as a civic centre, park or sporting club and often with a celebrant to officiate.

“There’s also a push for a more sustainable model of burial, where the body is buried in a shallow grave, contained either in a shroud or biodegradable coffin, with their grave often marked

with a GPS location or natural stone,” Mr Barrett said.

Many cemeteries have secluded bushland areas where this can happen; by law, a body must still be interred in an official burial

place, such as a cemetery. “The main point is whatever the ritual, loved ones want to feel the service is a meaningful farewell,” Mr Barrett said.

But before any ceremony or funeral, Mr Barrett urged families and friends to have an open and frank conversation surrounding death and bereavement, action endorsed by D2KDay.

“It’s always a good idea for families of a deceased loved one to meet before contacting a funeral director, so they can talk among themselves and agree to a day of burial, type of service, time and location,” Mr Barrett said.

Once that has happened, and after a GP has certified “life is extinct” and the death is by natural causes, then a funeral director can be contacted.

“Deaths happen in a number of places, such as nursing homes, homes and hospitals,” Mr Barrett said.

“We organise the transfer and care of the body from the place of death to a morgue, where the body is kept until decisions have been made regarding funerals and services.”