



Taking the Next Step

A Resource Guide for Beneficiaries



We at Liberty Mutual would like to extend our deepest condolences for your loss. The death of a loved one is a difficult experience. And while you're coping with these emotions, you are also facing many practical matters that require your attention.

To assist you during this time, this guide maps out the activities and resources that can help you settle your loved one's affairs.

We hope this information is helpful to you and your family during this difficult period.

If you have additional questions, please call us at 1-800-210-0268, extension 38559.

“Taking the Next Step” Beneficiary Resource Checklist

The following checklist provides a brief overview of key activities and important documents that may be required to settle your loved one’s affairs. Please reference the accompanying guide for more in-depth information.

Within the first two weeks

- Arrange care for dependents
- Request death certificate
- Contact employer and discuss available benefits and support services
- If the deceased lived alone, secure residence and cancel services

Within first month

Locate:

- Will or living trust
- Important documents
- Life/accidental death insurance policies, and submit claims

Contact:

- Lawyer or executor
- Banks/credit unions
- Home and automobile insurers
- Social Security Administration
- Department of Veterans Affairs (if applicable)
- Previous employers
- Union organizations
- Professional/membership/fraternal organizations
- Department of motor vehicles
- Credit card companies

Other:

- Pay home expenses (mortgage, utilities)
- Halt monthly benefit payments (disability, pension, Social Security)
- Inquire about disability survivor benefits (if applicable)
- Inquire about workers’ compensation death benefits (for work-related death only)
- Cancel scheduled appointments
- Update documents that designate deceased as beneficiary

Within first three months

- Secure, inventory, and document valuables
- Review documents and itemize assets
- Change registration of investment accounts
- Transfer ownership of property (cars, home)
- Locate previous tax returns and W-2 forms
- File state and federal tax returns
- Cancel subscriptions or memberships

Important Documents

- Death certificate
- Birth or adoption certificate(s)
- Citizenship papers (if applicable)
- Marriage certificate(s)
- Divorce records (if applicable)
- Children’s birth certificates, if minors
- Social Security number
- Veterans Administration claim number
- Military service/discharge documents
- Will/trust agreements
- Current bills
- Bank/investment statements
- Bank check/savings books
- Employer’s accident report (workers’ compensation claim)
- Security certificates (stocks, bonds)
- Real estate deeds
- W-2 forms
- Income tax returns
- Car registration
- Loan coupon books (mortgage, student loans)
- Insurance policies (home, auto, life)

Benefits/Sources of Income

- Life insurance (individual or through employer, mortgage, credit cards, health, automobile)
- Accidental Death & Dismemberment (AD&D) insurance
- Unpaid compensation and vacation time
- Social Security benefits
- Veterans benefits
- Workers’ compensation benefits
- Disability benefits
- Union benefits
- Professional/fraternal organization benefits
- Pension
- 401(k)/403(b)
- Individual Retirement Accounts (IRAs)
- Annuities, stocks, mutual funds, and bonds
- Checking/savings accounts

The Next Steps (the first month)

- Locate the deceased's will or living trust. The lawyer may have it, or it may be within personal files or a safe deposit box.
- Locate the following legal documents:

These documents, along with a certified death certificate, may be required to file for survivor or beneficiary benefits. Keep these documents organized and in an easily accessible but safe location, to facilitate and expedite the filing process.

 - **Marriage certificate or divorce papers** (if applicable)
 - **Birth or adoption certificates** of the deceased and any dependent children
 - **Social Security numbers** of the deceased, spouse, and dependent children
 - **Citizenship papers** (if applicable)
 - **Discharge papers.** If the deceased was a veteran, you will need a copy of the discharge certificate to collect veterans benefits. For additional information, contact the Department of Veterans Affairs at 1-800-827-1000.
- Locate and review all **insurance policies** for death-related benefits. Contact the appropriate financial institutions to submit claims. Usually, the policy number and a certified death certificate are required to complete a claim form.
 - Life insurance
 - Mortgage or loan insurance
 - Accident insurance
 - Health insurance
 - Auto insurance
 - Credit card insurance
 - Various types of insurance provided by the deceased's employer or union
- Contact the attorney and/or executor named in the will to handle **probate** court and estate matters. Probate procedures can be complex depending on the size of the estate, so expert legal advice may be helpful. Discuss and agree on fees before engaging legal assistance.
- Contact **banks** and **credit unions** to verify the status of the deceased's checking and savings accounts and safe deposit box(es). If the deceased had a joint account, ownership will usually pass to the other account holder. If the account was held in the deceased's name alone, the assets will have to go through probate.
- Contact the deceased's **home and automobile insurance companies**. Obtain current information on these policies and make the necessary arrangements to continue coverage.
- Contact the **Social Security Administration (SSA)** to determine what benefits may be available for the surviving spouse and/or minor children. Call the SSA at 1-800-772-1213 or visit www.ssa.gov for more information or to find your nearest SSA office.

The Next Steps (the first month) continued

- Contact the **Department of Veterans Affairs** if the deceased was a veteran. You may be able to receive assistance with the funeral expenses or other benefits. You will need a copy of the deceased's discharge papers. For additional information, contact the Department of Veterans Affairs at 1-800-827-1000 or visit www.va.gov.
- Contact the deceased's **previous employers** or **union organizations** to inquire about other benefits (such as pension or life insurance) that may be available to you.
- Notify any professional, membership, or fraternal **clubs** or **organizations** in which the deceased was a volunteer or member and inquire about available benefits.
- Notify the local **department of motor vehicles** if the deceased had a valid driver's license.
- Notify all **credit card companies** of the death to ensure that no one uses the deceased's cards. A certified death certificate may be required. Cancel the individual credit cards and arrange to have any remaining balances paid by the estate. Order a report from a credit card bureau to verify all credit cards under the deceased's name. The three major credit bureaus are:

Equifax

P.O. Box 740241
Atlanta, GA 30374
1-800-685-1111
www.equifax.com

Experian

P.O. Box 2002
Allen, TX 75013
1-888-397-3742
www.experian.com

TransUnion

P.O. Box 1000
Chester, PA 19022
1-800-888-4213
www.transunion.com

- Make sure **important bills**, such as mortgage, condo fees, rent, and utilities are paid. If the deceased owned a home, notify the mortgage company and arrange for payment.
- Determine whether the deceased was receiving Social Security, veterans, company pension, disability, workers' compensation, or any other types of **monthly benefit payments**. If the deceased was receiving benefits, notify the appropriate organizations to halt these benefits.
- If the deceased was receiving **disability** benefit payments, dependents may be eligible for survivor benefits. Contact the deceased's disability insurance company for more information.
- If the deceased died as a result of a work-related accident or injury, dependents may be eligible for **workers' compensation** death benefits. Contact the employer or the Department of Labor at 1-866-4-USA-DOL or www.dol.gov for additional information.
- If possible, locate the deceased's calendar and **cancel scheduled appointments**.
- Update **documents** and **accounts** that list the deceased as a beneficiary.

Additional Steps (within the first three months)

- Have the deceased's **valuables**, such as family heirlooms, antiques, jewelry, and other personal property, inventoried and secured. Document these items by taking photos or videos. If the deceased lived alone, have these items stored in a secure location or change the locks on the home.
- Locate other documents necessary to **itemize the deceased's assets**, such as real estate deeds, titles, investment accounts, stock and bond certificates, checking and savings account statements, and insurance policies.
- Review old checkbooks, tax returns, bank statements and canceled checks, and loan coupon books to **identify additional assets, benefits, or obligations**.
- Review deceased's **retirement and investment accounts**, including securities (mutual funds, stocks, and bonds), annuities, and IRAs. Contact the deceased's bank or financial planner if registrations have to be changed.
- **Transfer assets** and re-title the deceased's ownership documents for items such as a car, a house, or other property. The local division of motor vehicles or county assessor's office can provide additional information and appropriate forms.
- Locate the deceased's most recent **income tax return**. If you can't find it, you may need to contact the IRS to request a copy. The deceased's accountant or tax preparer should also be able to provide a copy of the return.
- Contact an **accountant or tax advisor** about filing state and federal tax returns.
- **Cancel any subscriptions or memberships** (magazine, movie rental, or gym) to which the deceased belonged. If the deceased was a member of any frequent flyer or hotel programs, ask about transferring the earned benefits.

We hope this guide has been helpful to you and your family. If you have any questions, please contact us at 1-800-210-0268, extension 38559.

For Your Information:

What should you discuss with the Employer?

1. **Death-related benefits**, such as group life insurance, unpaid compensation, accrued vacation pay, union benefits, pension plans, or other retirement or investment accounts. Request this information in writing for your records. You may be asked to submit a certified death certificate for each claim.
2. **Insurance**, such as employer-sponsored medical, vision, dental, and pharmacy coverage. If other family members were also covered, determine other insurance options. Dependents may be eligible for COBRA, which can extend health coverage for 18 months. Be sure to address this situation as soon as possible.
3. **Support services**, such as an employee assistance program or grief, financial, and legal counseling services for beneficiaries.

What if there is no will?

If your loved one died without a will, state law governs the administration process. Contact the clerk of court or probate court in the county of residence for further details. You may need to provide the deceased's birth certificate, marriage license, Social Security number, Veterans Administration number and record, a list of employer benefits, and tax returns for the past three years.

Can a divorced spouse qualify for Social Security survivor benefits?

A divorced spouse can receive survivor benefits if he/she meets certain age and length of marriage requirements. The former spouse does not have to meet these requirements if caring for a child who is also entitled to benefits. The child must be the deceased's natural or legally adopted child.

What is Probate?

Probate is the process of settling the deceased's debts and distributing the estate to the beneficiaries. If the deceased names an executor in the will, the court will appoint this individual to administer the estate. If there is no will or no executor is named, the court will appoint a "personal representative," usually a spouse or relative. This person will need to pay a filing fee; inform interested parties, especially creditors, that the estate is being probated; inventory the deceased's assets; and settle the estate according to the will or state laws.

Depending on the size and complexity of the estate, legal assistance may be required. Any jointly owned properties, as well as assets with designated beneficiaries, such as life insurance, IRAs, and pensions, are not subject to probate. The probate court can provide additional information on assets that should or should not be included in probate.

What Social Security benefits may be available?

Survivors should apply for benefits promptly. In some cases, benefits are paid from date of application and not the date of the worker's death. If the deceased had paid into Social Security for at least 10 years, two types of benefits are possible:

1. **Death benefits** are available to eligible spouses and dependent children. The survivor can complete the necessary form at the local Social Security office.
2. **Survivors benefits** are available depending on the age and relationship of the survivors.

What type of Veterans Survivors benefits might be available?

If the deceased was a veteran, survivors may be eligible for funds to cover funeral expenses. Burial in a national cemetery is free to a veteran and his or her spouse and dependent children. Veterans are also eligible for a headstone or grave marker. The surviving spouse and dependent children of disabled veterans may also be entitled to a lump sum death benefit or monthly payments for such things as educational assistance and medical care.

What taxes need to be filed?

Different types of state and/or federal taxes must be filed. Be sure to speak with an accountant or tax advisor about the following:

1. **Income Taxes:** Federal and state income taxes of the deceased are due for the year of death. Both tax returns are due on April 15 unless an extension is requested. The spouse of the deceased may file jointly for the year of death. Spouses with dependent children may file jointly for two additional years.
2. **Federal Estate Taxes:** A federal estate tax return must be filed and taxes paid within nine months of the date of death.
3. **State Estate Taxes:** While state laws vary, any estate that pays a federal estate tax must also file a state estate return. Contact the state tax or revenue department for further information.
4. **State Inheritance Taxes:** An inheritance tax is based on the portion of an estate received by an individual. State requirements vary; some states charge an inheritance tax while others do not. Contact your state tax department for additional information.

The IRS booklet, publication #559, *Information for Survivors, Executors, and Administrators* provides additional information on filing tax returns. For additional information, contact your local IRS office or visit www.irs.gov.

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