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WHERE THERE'S A WILL: 4 REASONS WHY PREPARING A WILL IS SO IMPORTANT

DID YOU KNOW THAT MORE THAN HALF OF ALL AUSTRALIANS DON'T HAVE A WILL – 52%, TO BE PRECISE. AND THAT FOR A THIRD OF THESE PEOPLE, THE REASON IS THAT THEY SIMPLY HAVEN'T GOT AROUND TO IT YET. THE REALITY, THOUGH, IS THAT YOUR WISHES SHOULDN'T BE OVERLOOKED – OR LEFT FOR 'SOME OTHER TIME' TO ACT ON.

IF YOU MAKE A WILL NOW, YOU'LL ENSURE THAT YOUR FAMILY IS LOOKED AFTER EXACTLY AS YOU INTEND AND HELP AVOID THE CONFUSION AND CONFLICT THAT UNCLEAR INTENTIONS CAN CAUSE AFTER YOU'RE GONE. YOU CAN ALSO LEAVE A LEGACY THAT INSPIRES THE PEOPLE AND CAUSES YOU CARE ABOUT.

BELONG, WE'RE UNPACKING OUR TOP 4 REASONS WHY CREATING A WILL IS SO IMPORTANT. WE'LL EXPLAIN WHY THE TIME TO WRITE A WILL IS TODAY – AND WHY IT'S EASIER THAN YOU THINK.

1. LEAVE NOTHING TO CHANCE – OR THE GOVERNMENT

When you're gone, will those closest to you know what to do? For the majority of Australians without a Will, the answer is likely a resounding 'no'.

So why is making a Will so crucial?

From funeral arrangements and asset distribution to caring for elderly relatives or young children, a lot of incredibly important decisions will need to be made when you die. And these – as Helen Beeby, Include a Charity Campaign Director, explains – shouldn't be left for others to decipher.

"It's incredibly important to write a Will," says Helen, "no matter your age. We may not like to think about it, but we've all read stories of sudden fatal accidents or illnesses – even in young people. If you haven't made a Will, then intestacy laws kick in – meaning the law decides where your assets will go."

"This, in turn, can lead to asset splits across your family by a legal formula. Or – in cases where there are only distant relatives – the estate will usually go to the state government. And no one wants the government getting its hands on their money!"

It's well known that Wills enable you to pass on sentimental jewellery and family heirlooms to specific loved ones. And [quirky gifts](#) spearheaded by Fundraising Institute Australia – is helping more and more people do just that. To encourage people to *include a charity* in their Will and, over time, make it the norm for many – not just a few.

2. AVOID FAMILY CONFLICT

By not preparing a Will, you could make the process of probate (that is, distributing your assets after you're gone) longer and more expensive than it needs to be.

Regrettably, those costs – time, money and stress – will fall on those closest to you.

The passing of a loved one is already a difficult time for all involved. And it's only made more challenging if the people left behind are also burdened with uncertainty and confusion.

Without a Will to refer to, some relatives may disagree about what happens to your Estate – and who should receive what. This can lead to the Will being contested – a situation that only leads to anguish and anxiety.

Family discussions can quickly turn into family *arguments*. Or worse, family breakdown.

As Helen says, "nearly everybody will have heard of (or can recount) stories of families arguing – or falling out altogether, sometimes irrevocably – over an inheritance. Or decisions in a Will they weren't expecting to see.

"We all like to think that wouldn't be us in such a situation – that blood is thicker than water. But the reality is, money gets in the way. Who would want that family friction, after they're gone?"

Writing a straightforward, legally binding Will helps take away that uncertainty, and prevent quarrels and antipathy. But it's also vital to speak to your family about your wishes, too – so they understand the Will and the reasons behind your decisions.

"Basically, it avoids arguments," says Helen. "By clearly outlining what you want to happen after you pass away, you can alleviate the stress on your grieving loved ones. They'll experience less confusion. And have the mental space they need to process your passing – plus the ability to honour your wishes the way you intended."

3. IT'S EASIER THAN YOU THINK

To ensure your Will covers all bases, Helen recommends engaging a legal professional. This is the best way to make sure that:

- Your Will is legally binding
- You're providing for your partner and your dependants
- No decisions are left to chance
- No costs are overlooked
- Tax planning (including minimising Capital Gains Tax) has been accounted for

Of course, hiring a lawyer can be expensive – is there another way?

"It's best practice to hire someone qualified to look at your Will," Helen explains, "to make sure all the legalese is there, and that everything's in the right place. There are DIY Will kits you can complete, but they're easy to get wrong.

One good alternative is to use an online Will platform. These tools – which are growing in popularity – guide you through the Will creation process as simply as possible. For an extra sum, you can then have a legal representative look over your completed Will, which is a good idea.

"What's more," Helen continues, "most of these platforms now have a component that allows you to easily include a charity in your Will. In fact, online Will writers are more likely to donate, with 16% (compared to the national average of 6.5%) leaving a charitable gift in their Will."

However, Helen acknowledges that starting a Will – to go from the ethereal to the actual *doing* – is one of the biggest barriers for most people. So, even if you're not yet ready to formalise your wishes in a Will, there are some simple, low-maintenance steps to get you started.

"Jump online, and start researching what you'll need to write your Will – there's so much useful info out there. If you have young children, you can begin to think about who you'll nominate to be their guardian, should something happen to you.

"Starting your Will can even be as straightforward as making an inventory of your possessions, and going from there."

4. CREATE A LASTING LEGACY

As humans, we love the concept of leaving a legacy. Of making our unique, indelible mark on the world. A stamp that persists long after we're gone and sets a positive, optimistic example for future generations.

So what should your legacy be?

Well, that's a question only you can answer. Many people wish to shape their legacy around the values that defined their life.

"By leaving a gift in your Will to a cause or charity that's close to your heart, you'll help ensure it's able to continue its vital work," says Helen. "It's an investment in humankind, a stake in our collective long-term future. It's a commitment to the longevity of whatever you care most about: be it curing diseases, supporting the arts, defending the vulnerable or protecting our environment.

"Of course, family and friends should come first in your Will – they're the people you love! But the money you leave to charity is an investment in a kinder, more inclusive tomorrow."

Beyond helping to ease the days and weeks after your passing, your Will can shape your legacy for years to come. Not only for you or your family, either – but for the causes you care about most.

Some people support the causes they champion now. Others select charities that helped their family through times of need.

In fact, two-thirds of Australians either want to leave a charitable gift in their Will, or are considering the idea. Yet just 6.5% of Australians actually do it – highlighting a stark disparity between principle and practice.

Perhaps more education is the answer – 46% of people, after all, believe solicitors should raise the option of charitable giving with their clients. On the other hand, it may be age-related, with studies showing that donors under 35 are 40% more likely to factor a charity into their Will.

Whatever the reason, Include a Charity is helping to turn the dial – supporting people to leave a charitable gift in their Will, and raising awareness of how simple it is to do.

Ready to make your mark? [Find charities that champion causes you care about](#) or [learn more about making a Will](#).

THE TIME TO WRITE YOUR WILL IS NOW

Our lives are a series of decisions. Like who we spend our time with. What we do for work. And what passions we pursue.

But after we're gone, there's only one way we can be sure our final wishes are fulfilled: by preparing a Will.

If we don't, our loved ones will need to make crucial choices for us. And, while they'll hopefully do their best to divide our assets fairly, they'll inevitably have to make a few assumptions along the way. This can lead to conflict and bitterness – not the legacy anyone wants to leave behind.

"Now's the time to reflect on what you want to happen next. And how you'd like to help make the world a better place after you're gone," says Helen.

"By writing a Will, you'll ensure your wishes are fulfilled: providing loved ones with certainty through a difficult time and shaping how you can support the next generation.

"The healthiest approach is when families plan and prepare. That talk about it – rather than face a surprise down the line."

By acknowledging that Wills aren't just for older people, and that the best time to start one is today, you can leave a lasting legacy – and nothing to chance. You'll also be supporting those you love most through one of the most challenging times of their lives, and helping the causes you care most about live on – long after you're gone.