

## However you feel, know that it all belongs

- Totally fine: I know I'll be okay
- It's complicated: I'm not sure how I feel quite yet
- Grief: this is a significant event in in my life

Previously, Indigenous patients from local nations and other communities across Turtle Island have requested to take the products of conception home for burial. We are committed to honouring these wishes and recognize that individuals from diverse cultural backgrounds may find meaning in this service as well.

To ensure all patients have access to the support they need, we have listed all available services at our facility. Every person's journey is deeply personal, and not all support services will feel helpful — and that's completely valid.

**We encourage all patients to use this handout to select the services that feel right for them, if any, to discuss in further detail with their provider.**

## **This facility offers the following services:** ***Speak with your provider(s) to learn more***

- Support lines (call/ text/ email)
- Contraception, including:
  - Oral, IUD, arm implant, injection
- Referrals to local in-person services
- Follow-up counselling
- Take the products of conception home: 20 weeks gestation and under only
- Smudging in facility (Indigenous patients only)
- Indigenous liaison (Indigenous patients only)

## Under 20 weeks + 0 days Gestation

### *Spontaneous pregnancy loss & termination of pregnancy*

If you had a spontaneous pregnancy loss or termination of pregnancy under 20 weeks + 0 days gestation, this handout uses the term “Products of Conception” (POC) when referring to the pregnancy tissue. We recognize that this term will not fit for everyone and apologize for any discomfort this may cause. Please tell your provider(s) which term(s) fit best for you.

**This handout outlines the available options for testing and releasing the POC. Your provider(s) can offer more details and answer any questions.**

### Testing

You can request testing (embryofetopathology and/or genetic testing) to examine the POC for anomalies or another explanation of what caused the pregnancy complication or loss. This is most helpful in cases of spontaneous pregnancy loss or suspected fetal anomalies. However, testing is optional, and you may choose not to have any tests performed.

### Handling

**To handle the POC, choose one of the following options:**

Whether or not you get testing done, the hospital can dispose of the tissue on your behalf. The hospital will incinerate the POC. Please note that in this case, the ashes will not be available to you.

You can have the POC transferred to a funeral home for burial or cremation — the ashes can be returned to you or scattered by the funeral home. This is usually available at 14 weeks gestation and over. Please note that funeral homes may or may not offer these services for free.

You can take the POC home yourself. See next page for further details on this option.

## Taking the POC home

**Patients must sign a release of liability document to take the POC home. To help you make an informed decision, the contents of this document are provided below for your review:**

- Once you take the POC, further testing will no longer be available.
- You will be given the POC in a sealed container that you cannot open on hospital/healthcare facility property.
- The POC should not be eaten or sold. Handling this tissue poses potential risks such as the risk of infection from various micro-organisms.
- You can choose to take the POC to a funeral home for burial or cremation.
- If you request testing and request to receive the POC afterwards, the hospital will contact you when the POC are ready for you to pick up.

**General guidelines for burying the POC are as follows:**

- Store the sealed container in a refrigerator away from food for no longer than 48-72 hours.
- Wear gloves and wash hands after handling the container/ POC.
- Burial must take place on private property. Public spaces, such as parks, cannot be used.
- POC must be buried at least 3 feet deep and in a safe distance from any water sources.

## Why patients may want to take the POC home

The importance of burying the POC varies from person to person. For some, cultural background or traditions may give this practice deep meaning. For others, it may be a new idea that feels supportive or healing during this time. Whatever your reason, our facility offers the option to take the POC home to any patient who requests it.

With that said, Indigenous patients in particular have requested this service and our facility is committed to addressing the ongoing impacts of colonialism and Indigenous-specific racism in order to provide a culturally safe, inclusive, healthy and respectful environment. Therefore, the next page of this resource describes the importance of burying the POC for Indigenous peoples, but we continue to offer this service to all patients.

## The importance of taking the products of conception home for Indigenous Peoples

For many Indigenous peoples (First Nations, Métis, and Inuit) across Turtle Island (North America), burying the POC is a form of ceremony.

**No matter how someone may feel towards their pregnancy and/or termination, whether desired or undesired, Indigenous patients may wish to bring their journey to a close through ceremony.**

Similarly to how burying the placenta and umbilical cord connects the child to the land they come from, burying the POC after a pregnancy loss or termination also honours the significance of place. Burying these products offers connection to land, ancestors, and family and may be viewed as completing the circle of life by returning the tissue to the land and spirit world. Some may choose to bury the products with sacred medicines — like sweetgrass, cedar, sage, or tobacco—as an offering or act of respect. This ceremony can help bring closure, an opportunity for prayer, to grieve, and to gather with loved ones. Like all Indigenous ceremonies, burying the products of conception strengthens Indigenous peoples' relationships to land, water, and all living things. This practice nurtures our spirit, promoting emotional, mental, and spiritual wellbeing for Indigenous people following a pregnancy loss or termination.

**Not all Indigenous people will align with these teachings or practice, and some may not wish to take these products home.** Being Indigenous does not automatically mean someone will want to engage in ceremony in this way and that is perfectly okay. Choosing not to take the POC home does not make someone any less Indigenous, nor does it diminish the need for culturally competent care. There is no expectation to take the POC home – you know what is best for you!

Due to colonial violence, including residential schools and religious influence, terminating a pregnancy remains highly stigmatized in many Indigenous communities. Some Indigenous patients may not have access to traditional teachings about abortion and may be unaware that burying the products of conception was—and continues to be—a cultural practice. Therefore, this resource is meant to offer information to support Indigenous patients in decision making. This information is not meant to be prescriptive since protocols will vary by nation; rather, we encourage you to take what you need and leave the rest in order to make this chapter whatever you need it to be.