

Design for Dying

dying
reviews

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The first collection of Dying Reviews has given valuable feedback on where our society can design better for dying. Hospice New Zealand invites anyone to use this expert-written guide of practical, actionable ways to better support people who are in their final phase of life, or caring for someone who is.

Everyone deserves dignity, care and compassion in their dying phase. How we treat people who are dying is a reflection of who we are as a society – it's something every workplace and organisation can contribute to.

1. Getting Started – building compassion into systems

Begin by reviewing what you already do:

- **Audit policies and processes** – Do they recognise the needs of terminally ill people and their carers? Do they use human language to address dying and death without ambiguity?
- **Review staff training** – Are people confident and supported when sensitive situations arise?
- **Check your customer journeys** – Do your digital systems allow for a human response where compassion is required, or do they default to rigid, automated processes?

- **Ask the hard question** – Is your system built for efficiency, or for humanity?

It's ok to start small. A simple internal review can spark meaningful change.

Find a checklist for reviewing your systems on page 5.

2. Customer Service Training – human conversations when it matters

When a customer is dying, their needs are deeply personal.

Automated responses and rigid rules can make an already difficult situation harder.

- Equip staff with practical language and tools to respond sensitively.
- Provide training on grief awareness and empathetic listening.

- Ensure escalation pathways exist so staff know when and how to provide flexibility.

Hospice New Zealand can connect you to training resources to help frontline teams feel confident and compassionate.

Contact info@dyingreviews.org

3. Compassionate Policies for employees living with a terminal illness

Working-age people facing a terminal diagnosis often feel invisible in workplace policies.

A compassionate employer can make a profound difference.

- Create a dedicated terminal illness policy, separate from standard sick leave or bereavement leave.
- Provide clear guidance for managers so staff know what support is available.
- Allow for flexible work arrangements – reduced hours, remote work, or role adjustments.
- Ensure access to financial advice, counselling, or EAP services.

4. Support for Managers – leading with sensitivity

Managers are often the first point of contact when an employee or customer discloses a terminal illness.

Without guidance, they may feel unprepared.

- Offer training in compassionate leadership.
- Develop scripts, FAQs, and scenarios for managers to draw on, as well as a 'pause and plan' toolkit for implementing policies.

- Build in peer support networks so managers can share experiences and seek advice.
- Encourage an open culture where managers feel supported to prioritise humanity over procedure.

When leaders role-model compassion, it filters through the entire organisation.

5. Resources – Tools for real situations

No two situations are the same, but organisations can be prepared with resources and guides, such as:

- For customers – steps to take when a customer is dying, including options for flexibility and sensitivity.
- For carers – guidance for staff or customers supporting someone who is dying.

- For managers – practical tools, checklists, and decision-making aids.

Hospice New Zealand provides a range of free resources and can help organisations adapt them to their context.

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Here are some starting points for an internal review:

1. Policy Review

- Do we have clear policies for terminal illness (for both staff and customers)?
- Have they been co-designed with a diverse set of perspectives?
- Are these accessible, and do managers know how to apply them?

2. Process Review

- Are our systems flexible enough to allow exceptions when compassion is needed?
- Do digital communications allow space for human interaction in sensitive cases?

3. Training Review

- Do our staff feel confident talking about death and dying?
- Is training offered regularly and reinforced, or only once at induction?
- Does our training include awareness of diverse cultural approaches to dying?

How organisations can audit their current approach

4. Culture Review

- Do staff believe they will be supported if they or a loved one are dying?
- Do leaders model compassion and flexibility in practice?

5. Feedback Loops

- Do we ask staff and customers about their experiences in these situations?
- Do we act on that feedback to improve?

Why this matters

Supporting people as they navigate the dying phase is about more than compliance – it's about humanity.

Organisations that embed compassion build trust, loyalty, and respect. More importantly, they help create a society where dying well is possible for everyone.

Further help

If you want more ideas on how to implement tangible change in your own business or organisation, reach out to Hospice New Zealand and we can help.

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