



Act Fast, Recover Strong, Live Well:

Information for Aboriginal
people experiencing
an amputation



SAHMRI

South Australian Health &
Medical Research Institute

We would like to acknowledge the Lived Experience Community Group who contributed significantly to this project;

Debra Hartwig (Koori)

James Wilson (Narungga, Kurna, Kokatha, Wirangu)

Kye Anderson (Ngarrindjeri)

Michael Turner (Nukunu)

Pauline Small (on behalf of Bernie, Warumungu)

Trevor Wingard (Ngarrindjeri, Kurna)

We would like to acknowledge the clinical staff who participated in this project, in particular the Clinical Working Group;

Sarah Wilson

Siobhan Jackson

Holly Wyatt

Kirrily Holton

A note on language:

These resources were co-created by South Australian Aboriginal community members with lived experience of amputation, in partnership with the Wardliparingga Aboriginal Health Equity Unit at SAHMRI. These resources use the term 'Aboriginal' to describe the people and communities in recognition of the traditional owners of the lands now called South Australia. We acknowledge the diversity of the people, families and communities, who live in South Australia, which includes people from various Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander backgrounds. These resources are for the benefit of all and the choice of terminology intends to respectfully acknowledge the backgrounds of the lived experience community group and the South Australian context that has informed the resources.

This project has received funding from the Australian Government.



To view the video resources that accompany this work, please scan here or visit the Limbs 4 Life Website:

<https://www.limbs4life.org.au/aboriginal-resources>

Act Fast:

Making Empowered Decisions

Considering Amputation - What You Need To Know

Hearing that you need an amputation can be overwhelming, and it is normal to have lots of questions and worries. But being prepared can help you take control of your journey and may even lead to better outcomes.

By understanding your options, asking the right questions, and seeking support, you can make informed decisions and feel more confident about what lies ahead.

Making an Informed Decision

When considering amputation options, it's important to evaluate all the potential impacts to make a well-informed choice.

Social

Your recovery as you adjust to life after an amputation can challenge your relationships and connections with your community. There are many programs available that support social reintegration and help create new social connections, opening doors for fresh friendships and opportunities.

Emotional

The emotional journey of amputation may bring challenges such as grief, loss, and shifts in your sense of identity. Understanding these emotional impacts and how to cope with them is crucial. Support is available through counselling services and peer support groups, including those specifically designed for amputees, as well as your family and healthcare staff.

Physical Impacts

Adjusting to the physical aspects of amputation may involve challenges such as pain management, physical limitations, and the need for rehabilitation. Access to services can help you manage these limitations, improve mobility, and increase independence. With the right support, many people find that they can regain significant function and lead an active life.

Legal Impacts

Legal protections are in place to ensure you receive the necessary healthcare and support, as well as to safeguard against unfair treatment in the workplace and other areas of life. Familiarising yourself with these rights and available services can help you make informed decisions and ensure you receive the support you're entitled to.

Seeking support from healthcare professionals, community organisations, and local Indigenous health services can help guide you through the process. Talking with community leaders can also help make sure your cultural needs and personal preferences are taken into account along the way, including advice on returning your limb to be buried on Country.

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Making Empowered Decisions

How can I make sure my needs are heard?

It is important that your cultural and health needs are respected throughout your care. Here are some ways to make sure your voice is heard:

- Be open with your healthcare team about what matters to you and discuss all your options.
- Write down your questions before appointments to make sure you remember everything you want to ask.
- Indigenous health organisations, like AHCSA , can connect you with culturally safe healthcare and support.
- Connect with the hospital Aboriginal liaison officers and Aboriginal health workers for extra support. They can yarn with you about how you are feeling and advocate for your wants and needs to be heard by the medical team. Ask your nurse about how to connect with this support.
- If it feels overwhelming, ask a trusted family or community member to support or advocate for you.

You have the right to be involved in decisions about your care, so don't be afraid to speak up and get the support you need.

Understanding your individual amputation needs

Every person's experience with amputation is different, and understanding your specific needs will help you prepare for the journey ahead. Amputation can occur for many reasons such as complications related to diabetes, infection, accidents or cancer.

These information sheets focus on major leg (major) amputations as the healthcare journey is very different compared to other toe or part of the foot (minor) amputations.

Talking with your family before surgery and having open discussions with your doctors, specialists, and support network can help you make the right decisions for you and your lifestyle.

The following information is general, but the questions should help you understand the process and advocate for your needs.

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Making Empowered Decisions

What will the surgery involve?

Amputation is a major surgery, and knowing what to expect can help you prepare physically and emotionally. The procedure will be different depending on the reason for your amputation, the location of the limb removal, and your overall health.

While every surgery is different, most amputation procedures follow a similar process:

- You will receive anaesthesia (either general anaesthetic to put you to sleep or a spinal anaesthetic to numb the lower body).
- The surgeon will remove the sick body part at the necessary point, making sure there is enough healthy tissue for healing.
- The surgeon will smooth the edges of the bones, reattach muscles, adjust muscles, make sure there is good blood supply for healing and seal nerves to reduce pain and discomfort later on.
- The wound will be closed with stitches or staples, and a bandage or dressing will be applied to protect the area. A drainage tube may be placed to prevent fluid buildup.
- After surgery, you will be taken to a recovery area for monitoring before you return to the ward.

Before surgery, your healthcare team will explain the process, answer your questions, and discuss pain management and recovery. If possible, you may also meet with a rehabilitation specialist or prosthetist to plan for life after the procedure.

These are all great opportunities to ask any questions you may have. Your medical team is here to support you through this journey.

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Making Empowered Decisions

What risks should I be aware of?

Like any operation, amputation carries some risks, which your doctor will discuss with you before the procedure.

Common risks include:

- Infection
- Poor Healing
- Phantom Limb sensation or pain (sensations or pain where the limb used to be)
- Blood Clots
- Swelling and Pain
- Emotional and Psychological Effects

Every amputation is different, so you may experience none of these risks, or more than one. It is important to speak to your healthcare team about these risks and how they can be managed.

Who will support my recovery at home?

Adjusting to life after an amputation can be a big change, and having the right people around you can make all the difference.

Talking openly with your family and friends about what's happening and what to expect will help them support you in the best way possible.

If certain people will be supporting you day-to-day, it might help to bring them along to doctor's appointments or meetings with specialists so they can better understand your journey and what to expect.

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Making Empowered Decisions

What kind of rehabilitation will I need?

Rehabilitation is an important part of recovery to help you regain strength and independence.

Your rehabilitation plan will be tailored to your needs, but typically includes:

- Wound Care & Pain Management
- Physiotherapy
- Occupational Therapy
- Podiatry to care for your other foot
- Prosthetic Training (if applicable)
- Mental & Emotional Wellbeing

Recovery times vary from person to person. Your healthcare team will work with you to set goals and create a rehabilitation plan that suits your needs.

What is a prosthetic?

Will I be able to use a prosthetic limb?

What other options are available?

A prosthetic is an artificial body part used to replace a missing limb or other part of the body, helping a person regain function and mobility.

Many people find that prosthetics help them regain mobility and independence, and your healthcare team will work with you to figure out the best option for your needs.

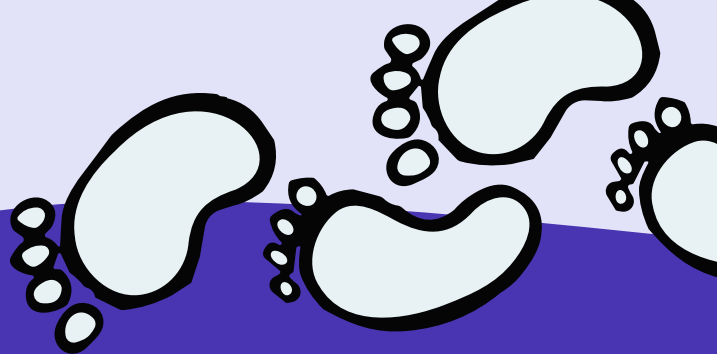
Whether you can use a prosthetic limb will depend on your type of amputation, your overall health, and what you hope to achieve.

If a prosthetic limb isn't right for you, there are still other options, including mobility aids like a wheelchair, or technology devices designed to help with specific tasks.

Your healthcare team is there to guide you through all your options and help you find the best path forward for your situation.

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Making Empowered Decisions



What emotional and mental health support is available?

Life after an amputation can be challenging, but there are services to support you. In addition to rehabilitation and physiotherapy, it is important to consider the impact an amputation can have on your overall wellbeing.

Options to consider include:

- **Mental Health Support:** Programs like SEWB (Social and Emotional Wellbeing) available through Aboriginal health services, 13 Yarn, Wellmob website, BeyondBlue, and Lifeline offer emotional support.
- **Cultural Healing and Community Support:** Staying connected to your culture and community can be a powerful source of comfort. Many Indigenous health services blend traditional healing with medical care. Some hospitals offer traditional healing, and you can request a visit from Aboriginal health workers or liaison officers.

If you are interested in accessing these services, you can speak to your nurse, the Aboriginal health team, or hospital social worker.

What financial assistance is available to help with my recovery and ongoing care?

There are several financial support options available to help with medical costs, rehabilitation, mobility aids, and everyday living expenses after an amputation.

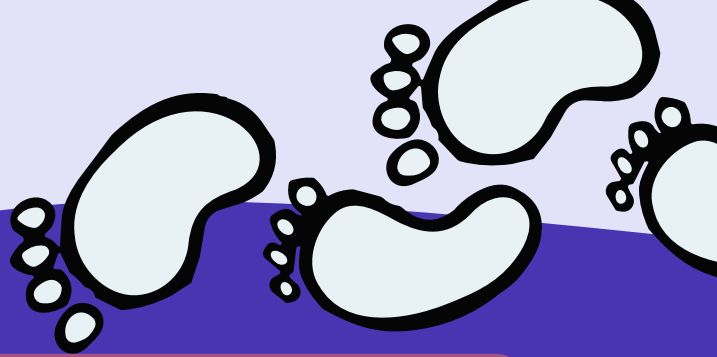
The type of assistance you can access will depend on your circumstances, but here are some key options to explore:

- **The National Disability Insurance Scheme (NDIS)** provides funding for people under 65 years old with permanent disabilities, including amputees. It can help cover:
 - Prosthetics, footwear, orthotics and mobility aids
 - Home modifications (such as ramps or handrails)
 - Physiotherapy, occupational therapy, podiatry and rehabilitation
 - Support services for daily living and community participation

To check if you're eligible and start the application process, visit the NDIS website or speak with an Indigenous disability support organisation. Your rehabilitation team can also help you with this.

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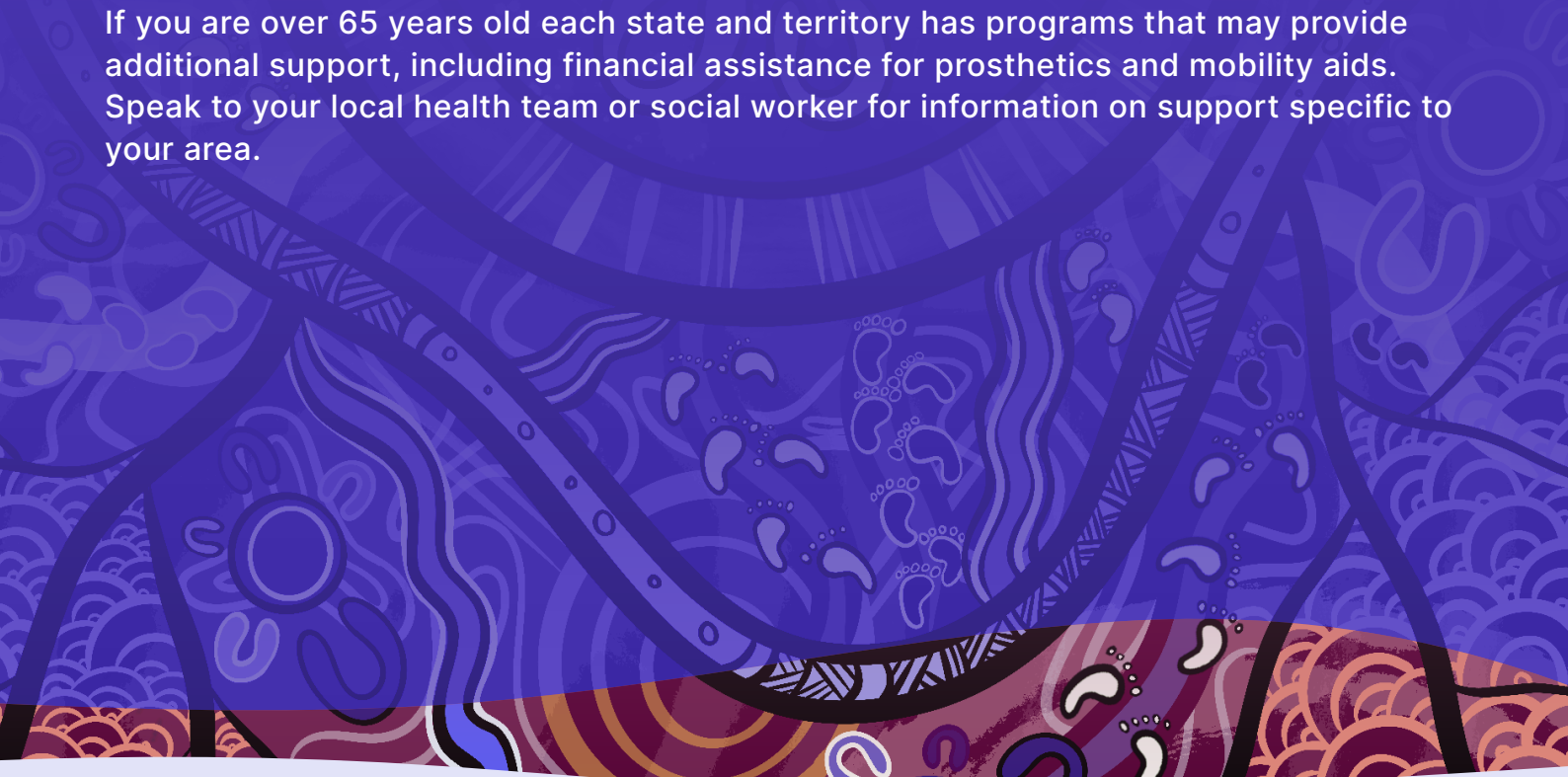
Making Empowered Decisions



What financial assistance is available to help with my recovery and ongoing care? (continued)

- **My Aged Care** provides funding to people aged over 65 years old to help them remain in their own home, or move into an aged care home. The Elder Care Support program through Aboriginal community controlled health services can help you navigate My Aged Care.
- **Centrelink** offers financial assistance for people who are unable to work or need extra support after an amputation, including the Disability Support Pension (DSP), Mobility Allowance and Carer Allowance. Visit servicesaustralia.gov.au for more information.
- **If you are a returned service person**, Department of Veteran Affairs (DVA) may be able to assist with financial assistance.
- **WorkCover** or another workplace insurance scheme may offer compensation or support if your amputation is due to a workplace injury. If you have private health insurance, check whether it covers prosthetics, rehabilitation, or home modifications.
- **If your amputation is due to a motor vehicle accident**, Lifetime Support Authority will assist in planning and funding your medical costs.
- **Aboriginal community controlled health organisations and Aboriginal medical services can help connect you to these resources.**

If you are over 65 years old each state and territory has programs that may provide additional support, including financial assistance for prosthetics and mobility aids. Speak to your local health team or social worker for information on support specific to your area.



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Making Empowered Decisions

How can I find out more?

Aboriginal Health Council of South Australia

www.ahcsa.org.au/members/locations/

Peak body representing Aboriginal community-controlled health services in South Australia.

Limbs4life

www.limbs4life.org.au/

Providing support to amputees, their families and care givers.

13Yarn

13 92 76 / www.13yarn.org.au/

National support line for Aboriginal & Torres Strait Islander people in crisis.

WellMob

<https://wellmob.org.au/>

Social, emotional and cultural wellbeing online resources for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander People.

NDIS

www.ndis.gov.au/

Federal Government program to support Australians with disability to live more independently and achieve their goals.

My Aged Care

www.myagedcare.gov.au/

Federal government support program for Indigenous Australians aged over 50 years.

Elder Care Support program

<https://ahcsa.org.au/programs/elder-care-support>

To help navigate and connect with aged care services.

Health Care Rights

https://www.hcscs.sa.gov.au/wp-content/uploads/2021/02/21_02_10-ATSI-Know-Your-Rights_f.pdf

Explains your rights when you are using South Australian Health services.

Your rights at work

<https://humanrights.gov.au/our-work/disability-rights/employee-rights-under-disability-discrimination-act>

Your rights as an employee under the Disability Discrimination Act 1992 (Cth).

Disability Gateway

<https://www.disabilitygateway.gov.au/>

The websites above may change over time, ask your health care team for suggestions if you need support.

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<https://www.limbs4life.org.au/aboriginal-resources>

Artwork by Brooke Rigney (Rigney-Lively)
Ngarrindjeri/Kaurna

Act Fast:

Planning for Amputation

Planning for Amputation

Losing a limb is a significant change, and it's natural to feel uncertain about what's ahead. Careful planning can help make the process smoother and ensure you have the right support in place. This guide provides key considerations before your hospital stay, during your time in the city, and when planning your return home.

Planning Your Hospital Stay

Preparing ahead of time can help reduce stress and ensure that everything is in place for your surgery and recovery.

Understanding Your Procedure

It's important to understand your surgery so you can feel more prepared and confident. Every amputation is different, depending on the reason for it, where the limb is removed, and your overall health. Talking to your doctor and amputee nurse about your surgery will help you know what to expect and how to plan for your recovery, so you feel ready for the next steps.



Act Fast:

Planning for Amputation

Planning Your Hospital Stay

You may want to ask questions such as:

- How long will the surgery take?
- How much of my limb will be removed?
- Will I need to stop taking any medications before the procedure?
- What kind of anaesthesia will I receive?
- What are the risks involved?
- Do I have any other options other than amputation?
- Am I a candidate for a prosthetic limb?
- What can I expect in the first few days after surgery?
- How long will I be in hospital for?
- How soon can I start rehabilitation, and what will it involve?
- How will my pain be managed after surgery?
- When can my family come and see me after surgery?
- When will I get home?
- What cultural support is available to me whilst in hospital?
- What will happen to my limb after it's been amputated?

- Can I talk to someone who has had the same thing happen to them?
- Will I need to see a counsellor after surgery?
- Do I need a carer after surgery?
- Is there a chance that the same thing could happen to my other leg or arms?

Understanding the type of amputation you will have and how it may affect your mobility and daily life will help you start preparing for any adjustments you may need.

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Planning for Amputation

Mental and Emotional Preparation

Amputation isn't just a physical change—it can bring up strong emotions. You may feel grief, fear, or uncertainty, and that's completely normal.

There are a number of people you can reach out to for support.

- Speak to a counsellor or an Elder who can help you work through your feelings and help you to make a plan.
- Talk to loved ones so they know what you're going through and how they can best support you.
- Connect to a peer support group which includes others who have been through a similar journey.

Responsibilities at home

In our families and communities, we often take on many important responsibilities, such as caring for children or looking after Elders. It's important to think about who can help with these tasks while you are in the hospital and during your recovery.

Your wellbeing should be the top priority, and making these arrangements before your surgery can help ease your mind and take some of the burden off your shoulders.

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Planning for Amputation

Financial Support

If you receive payments from Centrelink, it is important to understand the impacts a hospital stay may have on reporting requirements. If you need financial assistance, it's important to explore the different support options available to you. These could include:

- Jobseeker payment
- Disability Support Pension (DSP)
- Health care card
- National Disability insurance scheme
- My Aged Care

For more information, visit servicesaustralia.gov.au or speak with a community service provider who can guide you through the process.

Planning your recovery

If your amputation is taking place in a city hospital, it can be hard to be away from home and familiar surroundings. However, there are many support services available to help make your hospital stay comfortable and ensure you have the care you need.

Every hospital has different services, so ask what's available before your stay.

Act Fast:

Planning for Amputation

Cultural Support

Many hospitals have dedicated Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Health and Wellbeing Hubs or units. These hubs offer cultural support, assistance with navigating the hospital system, and connections to community services. The Aboriginal health workers and liaison officers can advocate for your needs, provide emotional support, and help ensure you feel comfortable during your hospital stay.

If possible, having a trusted family member or friend with you can provide emotional support, help with decision-making, and make it easier to communicate with your healthcare team.

Some hospitals also offer accommodation for family members who need to stay nearby while you're recovering. Speak to your healthcare team, Aboriginal health worker or social worker about what accommodation options may be available.



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Planning for Amputation

Recovery and Rehabilitation

In hospital, a dedicated team of healthcare professionals will support your recovery.

This team may include:

- Specialist doctors
- Surgeons
- Amputee nurses
- Physiotherapists
- Orthotist and prosthetists
- Occupational therapists
- Podiatrists
- Aboriginal health workers or liaison officer

Recovering from an amputation involves more than just healing from surgery—it's about regaining your independence and adapting to a new way of life.

Many city hospitals are linked to rehabilitation centres where you can get therapy to help you regain strength, mobility, and independence. These centres may be in the city, or in regional areas.

Once you have completed your initial rehabilitation, you may be referred to a local rehabilitation service to help you regain independence, improve safety when moving, and manage everyday activities like washing, dressing, and using a wheelchair.

Once you have completed your initial rehabilitation, you will have the opportunity to discuss with your rehabilitation team if prosthetic use is suitable for you. Prosthetic rehabilitation may occur in a different location to your initial rehabilitation. Remember it's ok to ask questions along the way.

It's important to stay informed about your treatment and recovery while you're in the hospital. The more you know about your care, the more confident and in control you'll feel.

Your Healthcare Team will help you to book follow-up appointments before leaving hospital.



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Planning for Amputation

Temporary Accommodation

If you live in a remote community, you may need to consider temporary accommodation closer to rehabilitation services before heading home to ensure you receive the care and therapy needed to support your recovery.

These may include hospital-run transition units, rehabilitation centres, or supported accommodation services that cater to people recovering from surgery.

Some facilities also provide access to Aboriginal health workers or cultural support services to ensure you feel comfortable and connected to community while away from home.

Speak to your healthcare team about the options which would best suit you.

Peer Support Groups

Going through an amputation is a life-changing experience, and while medical teams provide essential care, sometimes the most valuable support comes from people who have been through it themselves.

Peer support groups connect you with others who have experienced amputation, providing a space to share stories, ask questions, and learn from those who understand what you're going through.

If you're interested in connecting with a peer support group, speak to your healthcare team or an Aboriginal health worker who can help you find a group that suits your needs.

You can also organise to speak with someone yourself by contacting Limbs 4 Life directly.



Act Fast:

Planning for Amputation

How can I find out more?

WellMob

<https://wellmob.org.au/>

Social, emotional and cultural wellbeing online resources for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander People.

Limbs4life

www.limbs4life.org.au/

Providing support to amputees, their families and care givers.

13Yarn

13 92 76 / www.13yarn.org.au/

National support line for Aboriginal & Torres Strait Islander people in crisis.

Services Australia

servicesaustralia.gov.au

Delivers government payments and services.

Government Accommodation

<https://www.sa.gov.au/topics/housing/housing-for-aboriginal-people/travelling-to-services>

Safe, secure and culturally appropriate transitional accommodation centres for Aboriginal people who are visiting metropolitan centres from across borders or a remote community to access medical services.

Preventative Health SA

<https://www.preventivehealth.sa.gov.au/healthy-living/aboriginal-health-wellbeing/services-support-for-aboriginal-people>

Services and support networks that are culturally appropriate and respectful that are available to the South Australian Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander community.

The websites above may change over time, ask your health care team for suggestions if you need support.

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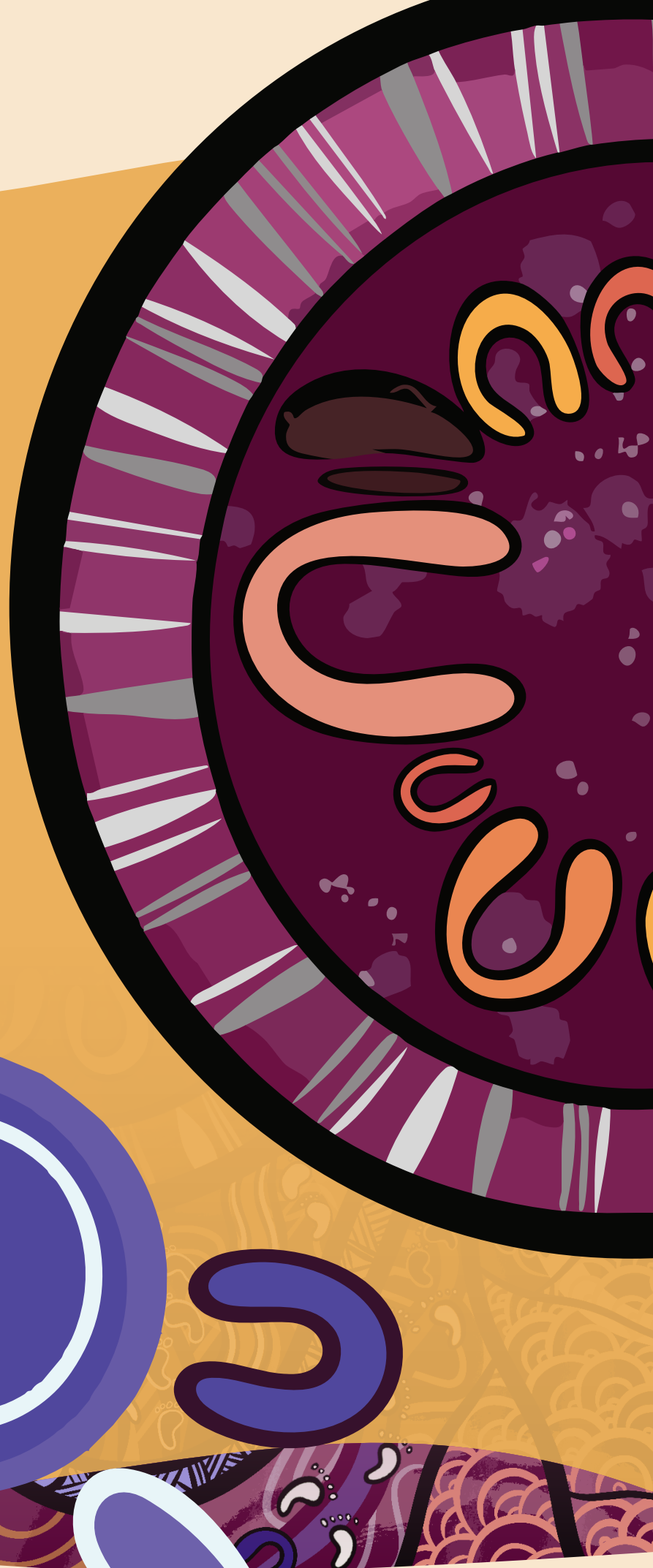
Recover Strong:

Your Amputation Journey

Your Amputation Journey - What to Expect?

Undergoing an amputation is a major life event that requires understanding and support. It is important to know what to expect during your recovery, the roles of your medical team, the importance of self-advocacy, the rehabilitation process, and the Aboriginal support services available to you and your family.

While the amputation journey can be challenging, with the right support and resources, you can lead a fulfilling and independent life.



Recover Strong:

Your Amputation Journey

Your Amputation Journey

Everyone's journey after an amputation is different, but typically follow these five stages. It is important to remember that at every stage, you can also ask to have an Aboriginal Liaison Officer or Aboriginal health worker with you for support.

Before Your Operation

Before your surgery, your healthcare team will check your overall health to make sure you're ready for the procedure and that there's nothing that could affect your recovery. You'll work with doctors and therapists to set clear goals and understand what will happen during your recovery.

Surgery Day

Prior to your surgery, you will check into the hospital and get ready for the operation. The surgical team will remove the affected limb while doing their best to keep as much of your limb and function as possible. After the surgery, you'll be closely monitored as you begin healing.

In-Hospital Care

After the surgery, you'll stay in the hospital where a team of surgeons, nurses, allied health professionals and Aboriginal health workers will help you heal. This time is all about resting and healing, but it is important to participate in the decisions about you, so you are ready for the next steps in your recovery.

Rehabilitation

Once your wound has healed, rehabilitation will help you regain independence. This could include walking, general mobility and navigating everyday activities like dressing, cooking, and personal care.

Your rehabilitation team may include rehab doctors, physiotherapists, occupational therapists, and prosthetists. Depending on your situation, you may return home or stay at a rehabilitation centre near the hospital.

Long-Term Support

Getting used to life after an amputation takes time. You will have regular check-ups with your healthcare team to check on your progress and fix any problems. It's important to know you are not alone and there's support to help you along the way. Staying connected with your support networks and staying informed will help you to recover strong.

Recover Strong:

Your Amputation Journey

Your Clinical Teams and Their Roles

Throughout your journey, a supportive healthcare team will work together to help you through each stage of your recovery. Each person plays a special role in helping you heal, to get back on your feet, and adjust to life after amputation.

- **Surgeons:** Perform the amputation surgery and manage your initial recovery, ensuring the best outcome for healing.
- **Nurses:** Provide daily care, monitor your healing, and manage any pain you may experience, helping you feel as comfortable as possible. Specialist amputee nurses will also be available to guide you on your journey.
- **Physiotherapists:** Work with you to regain your strength and mobility. If you're getting a prosthesis, they'll also help you learn how to use it effectively.
- **Occupational therapists:** Help you adapt to daily tasks and recommend tools or devices to make everyday life easier and more manageable.
- **Prosthetists:** Design and fit prosthetic limbs that suit your needs and lifestyle, and they'll help maintain your prosthesis over time.
- **Podiatrists:** Help you to look after your other limb. They can assist with footcare, provide footwear advice, and manufacture an orthotic for your foot.
- **Rehabilitation consultant (doctor):** will work with you and the bigger health care team to make sure all your health and medical needs are looked after.
- **Aboriginal health workers and liaison officers:** Make sure your care is culturally sensitive and appropriate, and they connect you with local community support and resources.

Each healthcare team is made of a different mix of specialists to ensure you get the right support at every step of your recovery. Remember you can ask who people are and what their role is at any time.

Recover Strong:

Your Amputation Journey

Rehabilitation

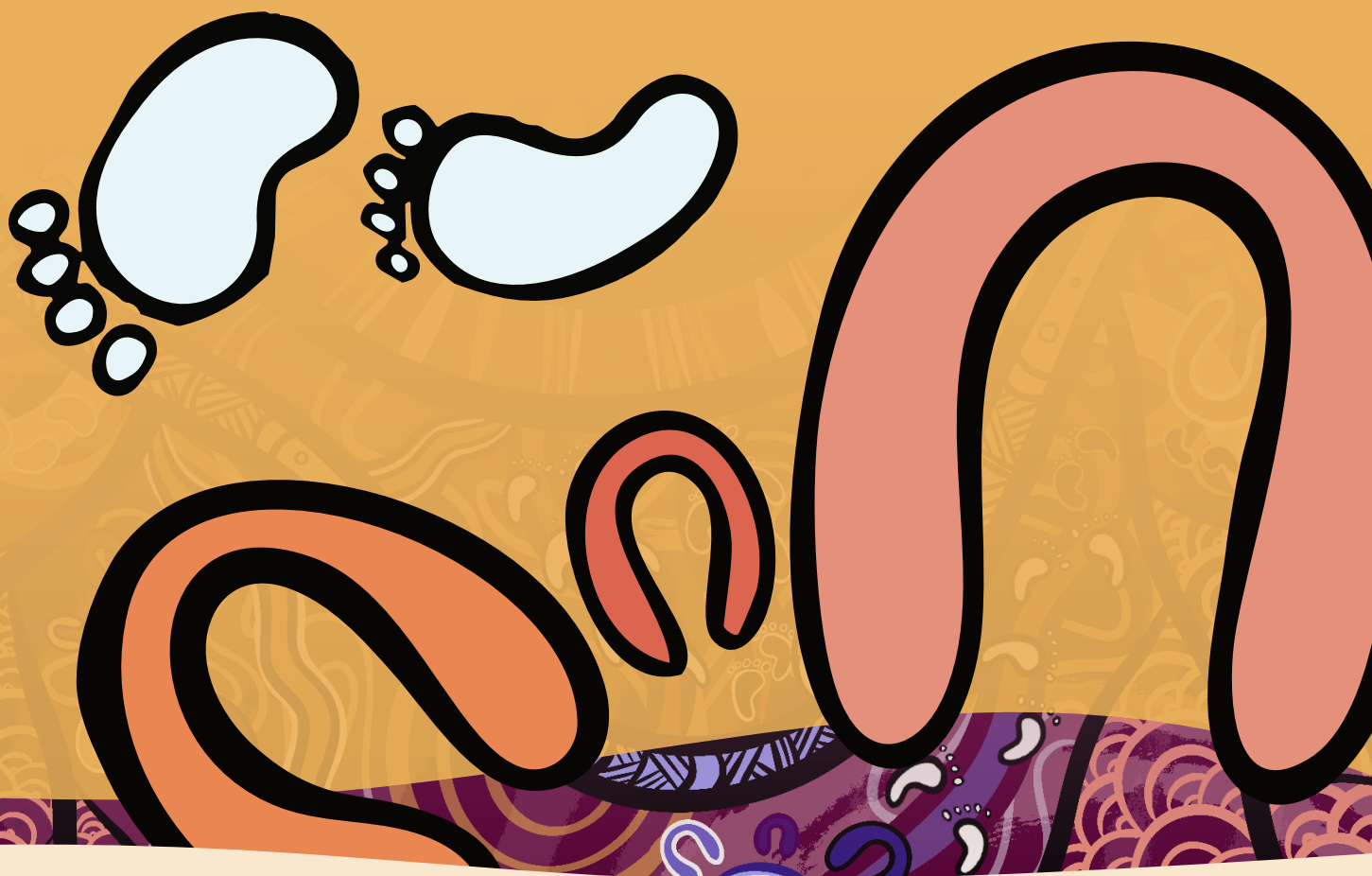
Rehabilitation is an important part of your recovery, helping you regain independence and improve your quality of life.

Firstly, you will work with your healthcare team, assess your current health and set personal goals to help in planning your rehabilitation journey and determining suitable prosthetic options if needed.

Your team will then create a rehabilitation plan that is focused on restoring your independence and quality of life.

Your rehabilitation plan could include:

- **Mobility Support:** Exercises and activities to improve strength, balance, and mobility.
- **Prosthetic Training:** Learning to use and care for a prosthetic limb, if applicable.
- **Occupational Therapy:** Strategies to adapt daily tasks and recommend assistive devices and assess your home to see if it is safe to go home.
- **Psychological Support:** Addressing emotional well-being and coping strategies.



Recover Strong:

Your Amputation Journey

Speak Up! Let people know what you need

It is important to understand your rights and take an active role in decisions about your healthcare. This includes speaking up about your needs, preferences, cultural needs and any concerns you have, so you feel listened to, informed, and involved in your care.

There are a few ways you can make sure this happens:

- Be open with your healthcare team about what matters to you and discuss all your options. If you wish, yarn with the Aboriginal health workers and Aboriginal liaison officers at the hospital and they can help you speak with the healthcare team.
- Write down your questions before appointments to help you remember everything you want to ask.
- Indigenous health organisations, like ACCHOs, can connect you with culturally safe healthcare and support.
- If it feels too much, ask a trusted family member or community member to help advocate for you.
- While you're in hospital, if something doesn't feel or look right, speak up and tell the staff. If you're still concerned, you can ask for a patient- or family-initiated medical emergency response. Look for the "You're worried, we're listening" posters around the hospital for the phone number you can call.

You have the right to be involved in decisions about your care, so don't hesitate to speak up and get the support you need.

Recover Strong:

Your Amputation Journey

Aboriginal Support Services

Aboriginal support services offer culturally respectful practical and emotional support to individuals and families. They provide connections to Elders and community leaders, traditional healing practices, and guidance that help build strength, resilience, and a sense of belonging during the recovery journey.

Aboriginal support services offer:

- Connection to Elders and Community who offer guidance, traditional healing practices, and emotional support.
- Practical assistance, such as transport to medical appointments, navigating government services, or offering financial aid to support recovery.
- Culturally appropriate mental health support, including counselling, peer support groups, and resources.
- Cultural understanding and sensitivity.
- Advocacy and resources to assist in navigating the healthcare system.
- Connecting families with others who have gone through similar experiences.



Recover Strong:

Your Amputation Journey

How can I find out more?

13Yarn

13 92 76 / www.13yarn.org.au/

National support line for Aboriginal & Torres Strait Islander people in crisis.

WellMob

<https://wellmob.org.au/>

Social, emotional and cultural wellbeing online resources for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander People.

Patient initiated medical emergency response

If you are worried about your care whilst in hospital, talk to the nurses and doctors. If you still don't feel like you are being listened to, you can request a medical emergency response to raise your concerns. SA Health You're worried, we're listening | SA Health

Royal Adelaide and The Queen Elizabeth Hospitals escalation phone number Concerns about your care | Central Adelaide Local Health Network.

Preventative Health SA

<https://www.preventivehealth.sa.gov.au/healthy-living/aboriginal-health-wellbeing/services-support-for-aboriginal-people>

State Government services and support for Aboriginal people.

SAACCON

<https://saacson.org.au/our-members/>

Aboriginal Community Controlled Organisations in South Australia who provide services and supports for community

Aboriginal Health Council of South Australia

www.ahcsa.org.au/members/locations/

Peak body representing Aboriginal community-controlled health services in South Australia.

Limbs4life

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Health Care Rights

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Artwork by Brooke Rigney (Rigney-Lively)
Ngarrindjeri/Kaurna

Live Well:

Returning Home After Amputation

Getting your home ready

Your home should be a place where you feel safe, comfortable, and able to move around with ease. Making changes before you return can help your recovery and prevent falls or injuries.

Depending on your needs, you and your healthcare team might consider:

- Checking your moveability around your home. Is it wheelchair friendly?
- Installing handrails and grab bars in the bathroom and stairways
- Moving furniture to create clear and wide pathways
- Changing the height of your bed and seating areas. For example, adjustable beds
- Using non-slip mats
- Removing trip hazards such as rugs, cords, or clutter
- Installing ramps
- Adaptive kitchen tools, reachers and grabbers
- Car modifications so you can resume using your vehicle

Planning ahead of time with your healthcare team will make your return home smoother, save unnecessary expensive changes, and allow you to focus on healing and regaining your independence.

Recovering Well

Recovery continues once you return home, and looking after your health becomes an ongoing priority. Setting up the right support will help you manage your recovery, stay comfortable, and build independence as you continue to heal.

Medical Check-Ups and Rehabilitation

It's important to schedule follow-up appointments with your local doctor, rehabilitation team, amputation nurse, and prosthetics specialists and any others involved in your care to help track your healing progress, manage any pain or discomfort, and address any concerns that arise to ensure that your recovery stays on track.

Physiotherapy and occupational therapy are important to help you to regain strength, balance, and mobility. These therapies can help you learn new ways to move, improve your independence in daily activities.

It is important to keep looking after your other foot. Keeping in regular contact with your podiatrist will help keep an eye on how things are going.

Work closely with your healthcare team to identify the best supports within your community, an at-home program and/or telehealth support.

Live Well:

Returning Home After Amputation

Wound Care

Proper wound care is important in the weeks and months following surgery. If you have diabetes or other conditions that affect blood circulation and healing, additional care may be needed to prevent complications.

Community health services can provide ongoing wound care, bandage changes, and monitoring for signs of infection.

You can contact your local Indigenous health service to explore culturally appropriate care and support options available to you.

Your healthcare provider or a local community service organisation can also help find services in your area.

Emotional and Cultural Well-being

Losing a limb affects not just your body but also your mind, emotions, and spirit. It's important to recognise these challenges and find the right ways to support you through the recovery process.

Including cultural and emotional well-being into your plan can bring you peace, purpose, and healing. With the support of your community, Elders, and professional counselors, you'll have the strength to get through this challenging time and move forward.

- Cultural Practices - Engaging with Elders and community leaders can help incorporate traditional healing practices into your recovery process.
- Community Support - Your family and community are invaluable sources of support.
- Professional Counseling – it can help your recovery to have a culturally competent therapist who can guide you through feelings about your amputation, helping you process these emotions in a healthy way. Speak with your rehab team to connect you with someone appropriate or you can talk to your GP to put a Medicare mental health treatment plan in place to help you access these services outside the hospital.

Live Well:

Returning Home After Amputation

Supportive Spaces

As you continue your recovery journey, it's important that your environment supports your needs, whether at home, work, or school. Creating a safe and comfortable space is essential for regaining independence and staying on track with your rehabilitation. Speak with your health care team about when is the right time for you to return to work or education.

Support at Work

It's important to work closely with your employer to make sure your return to work feels as smooth and comfortable as possible.

This includes having an open conversation about leave options and any workplace adjustments that you will need to make sure you feel supported.

The Employment Assistance Fund offers financial assistance to cover the cost of workplace modifications, assistive equipment, and support services for people with disabilities, including amputees. Employers and employees can apply for this funding through JobAccess.

Some important questions are:

- Is there enough space in your office for you to move around freely?
- Is your desk or chairs appropriate for you or do you need an adjustable option?
- Do you need extra time or help to attend meetings?
- Are the toilet facilities accessible for you?
- Do you need help with transport?

Live Well:

Returning Home After Amputation

Support at School

Returning to school, TAFE, or university after an amputation can feel like a big step, but with the right support, you can continue learning, connecting with friends, and participating in school life.

Your education is important, and there are people ready to help you along the way, ensuring you continue to grow and learn in a way that works for you.

It's important to talk to the school's wellbeing team, disability support officer, or principal to create a plan that meets your needs, helping you feel comfortable and confident.

Some important questions are:

- Is there enough space in your classroom for you to move around freely?
- Are the desks and chairs appropriate for you or do you need an adjustable option?
- Do you need extra time or help so you can get between classes?
- Are the toilet facilities accessible for you?
- Do you need help with transport?

Participating in sports, art, music, and cultural activities at your school is a great way to stay connected, express yourself, and build confidence. Talk to your teachers or coaches about what works best for you and what changes can be made to ensure you can take part comfortably and safely.

Live Well:

Returning Home After Amputation

Community Connections

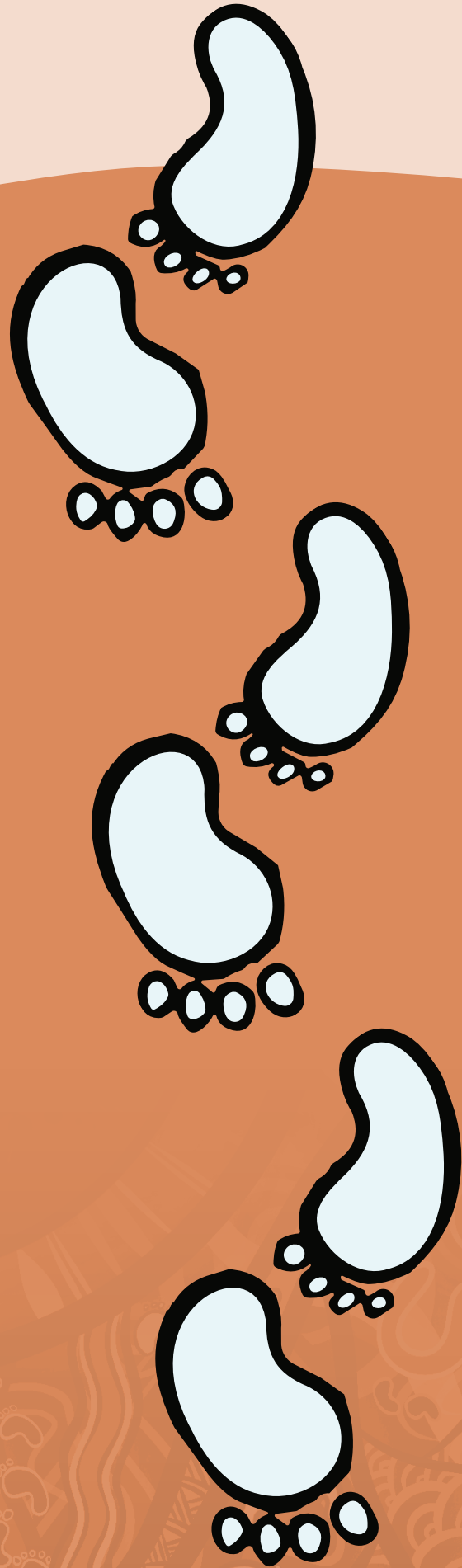
Staying Part of Your Community

Staying connected with your community is an important part of your recovery. It helps you feel like you belong and gives you the support you need as you adjust to life after amputation. Spending time with others can bring strength, comfort, and help you stay connected to your culture and identity, which is important for healing.

Getting involved in community events and cultural activities is a great way to stay social, have fun, and make lasting memories with people who share similar experiences. It's also a chance to meet others in your community who have been through an amputation or have a loved one who has. There are options to get involved both at in-person meetings or by joining an online group such as those run by Limbs 4 Life.

If you are finding it difficult to stay involved, speak to a family member, Elder, or one of your support services to find new ways to reconnect and get the support you need.

Peer support groups offer a chance to talk with someone who understands what you're going through, which can be helpful and comforting.



Live Well:

Returning Home After Amputation

Community Connections

When you are ready, your experience can make a difference for others who are facing similar challenges. By sharing your journey and supporting those around you, you can help raise awareness, promote understanding, and build a stronger community for amputees.

Here are some ways you can help others:

- Look out for people who are caring for you whilst you recover from your amputation.
- Get involved in programs that support amputees and work to improve their rights and needs.
- Join community conversations to raise awareness and share your experiences.
- Let others know about resources and services that can help.
- Share your story to show others they are not alone and offer strength to those who may be feeling isolated or unsure.
- Be there for people who need advice, listen to their experiences, or offer a kind word when needed.

Live Well:

Returning Home After Amputation

How can I find out more?

13Yarn

13 92 76 / www.13yarn.org.au/

National support line for Aboriginal & Torres Strait Islander people in crisis.

Limbs4life - Peer Support

<https://www.limbs4life.org.au/peer-support>

Connecting individuals and their families pre or post amputation with trained amputees who have experience living with, and adapting to limb loss.

WellMob

<https://wellmob.org.au/>

Social, emotional and cultural wellbeing online resources for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander People.

Employment Assistance Fund (EAF)

<https://jobaccess.gov.au/i-am-a-person-with-disability/looking-applying-job/government-services-help-you/funding-workplace-changes/what-eaf>

1800 464 800

Provides reimbursements for workplace modifications, equipment and services necessary for a person with disability to perform their employment duties.

Your rights at work

<https://humanrights.gov.au/our-work/disability-rights/employee-rights-under-disability-discrimination-act>

Your rights as an employee under the Disability Discrimination Act 1992 (Cth).

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Artwork by Brooke Rigney (Rigney-Lively)
Ngarrindjeri/Kaurna

Mental health treatment plan

<https://toolkit.lifeline.org.au/articles/general/what-is-a-mental-health-treatment-plan>

A plan created by your GP in collaboration with you to outline goals and actions for your mental health treatment, providing access to Medicare-rebated sessions with allied health professionals like psychologists and social workers.

Disability Gateway

<https://www.disabilitygateway.gov.au/>

Helps people with disability, their families and carers find the information, services and support they need.

Preventative Health SA

<https://www.preventivehealth.sa.gov.au/healthy-living/aboriginal-health-wellbeing/services-support-for-aboriginal-people>

Services and support networks that are culturally appropriate and respectful that are available to the South Australian Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander community.

The websites above may change over time, ask your health care team for suggestions if you need support.



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<https://www.limbs4life.org.au/aboriginal-resources>

Support After Amputation:

A Guide for Families

What to Expect After Amputation

The recovery process after an amputation involves physical and emotional challenges.

After surgery, your loved one may experience pain, swelling, and limited mobility. They may require help with basic tasks such as dressing, bathing, and moving around.

Over time, they may begin physical therapy to help regain strength and mobility, and it's important to support them through this process.

Nursing and Care Requirements

Depending on the type of amputation and their health condition, short or long term nursing care may be needed. Hospital staff will help arrange this before your family member comes home.

This could include:

- **Wound care**
- **Medication management**

A home health nurse or other professional services may be available to assist with ongoing care. Speak with healthcare providers to get the support your family needs.

Support After Amputation:

A Guide for Families

Rehabilitation

After an amputation, rehabilitation is an important part of recovery and learning to adapt to everyday life. It helps with building strength, improving mobility, and gaining confidence in using mobility aids or prosthetics.

Regular check-ups with your GP, specialist doctors, surgeons, and physiotherapists, podiatrist, orthotist and prosthetist will help to monitor healing, address any challenges, and provide ongoing support. Staying connected with healthcare professionals will make sure your family member receives the best care, guidance, and treatment options.

This process can take time and patience, but with the right support, progress can be made.

As a family member, there are many ways you can support your loved one through rehabilitation:

- **Ask questions yourself of the healthcare team so you understand the amputation journey too.**
- **Speak up for your family member with the healthcare team if they wish you too.**
- **Offer words of encouragement and celebrate their progress, no matter how small.**
- **Gently remind them to do their exercises and assist when needed.**
- **Help them practice using mobility aids to build confidence and independence.**
- **Ensure your home is set up safely to support their recovery, making adjustments as needed.**

Your support can make a big difference in their healing journey, helping them regain strength and adapt to new routines.

Support After Amputation:

A Guide for Families

Managing Pain

After an amputation, your family member may experience pain in the remaining limb or other areas where muscles have become tense or imbalanced.

They may also have phantom limb sensation or pain, where they feel sensations like itching, burning, or cramping in the limb that is no longer there. This is a common experience, but it can be hard to deal with.

Pain levels can vary, and finding the right management approach takes time. If your loved one is struggling with ongoing sensations or pain, working with their healthcare provider can help find the right treatment options to bring relief.

As a family member, you can offer support by:

- **Encouraging them to talk openly with healthcare providers to find the best pain management strategies.**
- **Attending medical appointments to help advocate for their needs.**
- **Assisting with therapies to help with their sensations or pain.**

Support After Amputation:

A Guide for Families

Understanding Prosthetics

Once the recovery from amputation has progressed, your family member may begin the process of getting a prosthetic limb.

A prosthetic limb is an artificial body part used to replace a missing limb or other part of the body, helping a person regain function and mobility.

You can play a supportive role in this process by helping them through the stages of fitting, adjustments, and learning how to use the prosthetic.

It can take time to get used to using a prosthetic limb. You can make a big difference in their recovery by encouraging them to practice and providing patience and emotional support during hard times.

Prosthetics are usually funded by NDIS or state government funding schemes.

Support After Amputation:

A Guide for Families

Supporting Their Emotional Wellbeing

Losing a limb can be hard, and it's normal to feel sad, frustrated, or overwhelmed when returning home after surgery. As a family member, being there to listen and offer support can make a big difference. Encourage them to talk about how they're feeling and let them know they're not alone.

Support groups for amputees and their families can offer advice, emotional support, and a sense of community with others who understand the experience who can provide encouragement and practical tips.

It is also important to watch for signs of depression or anxiety and encourage your loved one to get help when needed. If these feelings persist, professional counseling could help. Encourage them to reach out for support, and if you're concerned, your GP or organisations like WellMob, 13YARN and Beyond Blue offer 24/7 guidance and support.

Support After Amputation:

A Guide for Families

Your Wellbeing and Respite

Caring for someone after an amputation can be physically and emotionally demanding. It's important that you look after your own well-being to avoid feeling overwhelmed so you can continue providing support.

There are a number of resources to help you manage the challenges of caregiving:

- Carer support services, like Carer Gateway, can connect you with support networks, keep you linked in with community, and financial assistance.
- Mental health support is available for caregivers who may be struggling with stress, anxiety, or burnout. Speaking to a counsellor or support group can be invaluable during difficult times.
- Respite services provide the opportunity to take a break and recharge while knowing your loved one is in safe hands. These services may include in-home care, day programs, or short-term stays in residential care.
- Practical support, advocacy and resources are available to help you in your caring role, such as helping you to continue your education whilst you have caring responsibilities.

Speak with your GP, healthcare provider or local community services to find out about options available in your area. Taking care of yourself will help ensure you can continue to care for your loved one without becoming overwhelmed.

Support After Amputation:

A Guide for Families

Financial Assistance and Practical Support

There are various government programs and non-profit organisations that can offer financial assistance, either for the cost of care or the costs associated with the amputation and prosthetics.

- **National Disability Insurance Scheme (NDIS):** the NDIS provides support for Australians under 65yrs of age at the time of their amputation, including funding for prosthetic limbs and related services. It's important to consult with your social worker or NDIS representatives to understand the support available to you.
- **My Aged Care:** is available to Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people from the age of 50 who require support to stay in their home or transition to an aged care home. Again, speaking with your social worker or visiting the website is a great starting place to learn what help you can get.
- **Centrelink:** Centrelink offers financial assistance and employment support to individuals with disabilities, including those recovering from amputations. Carer allowances are also available.
- **State-Based Prosthetic Services:** Each Australian state has its own prosthetic services that offer financial assistance and support. Be sure to check with local health centres, hospitals, or community organisations to learn about what's available in your area.

Support After Amputation:

A Guide for Families

How can I find out more?

Carer Gateway:

<https://www.carergateway.gov.au/>

Carer Gateway is an Australian Government program providing free services and support for carers.

Carers SA

Information and support for First Nations carers, young carers and their families, including peer support, respite advice, counselling, coaching, advocacy, and practical support.

<https://www.carerssa.com.au/about-us/first-nations/>

WellMob

<https://wellmob.org.au/>

Social, emotional and cultural wellbeing online resources for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander People.

13Yarn

13 92 76 / www.13yarn.org.au/

National support line for Aboriginal & Torres Strait Islander people in crisis.

Preventative Health SA

<https://www.preventivehealth.sa.gov.au/healthy-living/aboriginal-health-wellbeing/services-support-for-aboriginal-people>

List of services and support for Aboriginal people to stay connected.

Services Australia

<https://www.servicesaustralia.gov.au/caring-for-someone>

Support including carer financial payments.

NDIS

www.ndis.gov.au/

Federal Government program to support Australians with disability to live more independently and achieve their goals.

My Aged Care

www.myagedcare.gov.au/

Federal government support program for Indigenous Australians aged over 50 years.

Limbs4life - Peer Support

<https://www.limbs4life.org.au/peer-support>

Connecting individuals and their families pre or post amputation with trained amputees who have experience living with, and adapting to limb loss.

Limbs for Life also have a closed Facebook group where you can connect with others in a similar situation –

Search on Facebook for: Amputees Australia - Limbs 4 Life.

State-based prosthetic funding

<https://www.limbs4life.org.au/funding/artificial-limb-schemes>

State based prosthetic services.

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Artwork by Brooke Rigney (Rigney-Lively)
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Notes

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Notes

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“Connection in story, strength in journey”

This artwork represents Aboriginal people and their families across South Australia who have experienced, or are currently experiencing, amputation as a result of diabetes.

Amputation as a result of diabetes, marks a milestone of a long and often challenging journey toward mobility and healing. Mobility after amputation may take many forms - prosthetics, crutches, or wheelchairs – each reflecting a different path of within the piece represented by journey lines.

The brighter colours in the piece were chosen intentionally. The contrast with the daunting nature of this journey, through colour, joy, and hope are represented. These vibrant tones reflect the beauty found in the people and the carers who walk this path together, celebrating strength through hardship.

The journeys of amputees are shown through white, purple and black footprints (depending on the different amputation type) and wheelchair tracks, symbolising their unique pathways to meet

together in the centre to share their stories and support one another.

Alongside these tracks are coloured footprints, representing the carers and loved ones who walk beside amputees, providing the support, care and encouragement required for this journey both physically and spiritually.

Surrounding the artwork are community circles, symbolising the diversity of Aboriginal peoples and cultures across South Australia. Interwoven patterns reflect Country, waterways and sea, honouring the deep connections we as Aboriginal people hold with land, kin and culture. These connections embody the healing power of community and Country, integral to supporting and understanding amputees and their families throughout their journey.

Finally, all roads in the piece lead to a lived experience community, a gathering place where people come together to share their stories. By passing on their experiences, community members hope to ease the path for others who may face amputation in the future.

