BEYOND TODAY:

A Practical Will Planning Guide
from the Canadian Red Cross

Turkish Red Crescent / Anadolu Ajansı

A Guide to Planning Your Will

Have you been thinking about making a Will but haven't been sure how to start? This Will Planning Guide can help turn your good intentions into a clear plan of action. After all, at the Red Cross, we know that being prepared can make a big difference.

Creating a Will isn't as complicated as you might think. Our easy-to-follow guide walks you through each step of the process. **This guide shows you:**

- ✔ How to make a new Will, or when you should update the one you already have.
- ✔ The important information you'll need to collect as part of the Will-planning process.
- ✔ Things to think about when planning your estate.

Making a Will gives you peace of mind by ensuring your belongings go where you want. And, it makes things easier for your loved ones during a difficult time, enabling them to feel confident that they are honouring your wishes.

Our Will Planning Guide explains everything in simple terms so you can feel comfortable with your decisions. It is not, however, intended to replace advice from a professional legal advisor who can tailor your estate plan to your specific situation.

We created this guide to help you understand the Will-making process and what you may want to think about when writing your Will. We'll walk you through what's needed and help you get started.

> ***Are you ready to take this important step?***
>
> If you are feeling overwhelmed, we completely understand. We're here to make the process easier for you. Please feel free to reach out to us by phone at **1-800-418-1111** or email us at **WeCare@redcross.ca**.

This Will Planning Guide may offer you helpful information. It is not, however, intended to replace advice from a professional legal advisor who can tailor your estate plan to your specific situation.

Why You Need a Will

Making a Will might seem like something you can put off until tomorrow. But your Will is one of the most important documents you'll ever create. It's not just paperwork—**it's your voice speaking when you no longer can.**

Many people put off making a Will because it seems complicated, or they think they don't own enough to need one. But the truth is, everyone needs a Will—regardless of age or wealth. Without a Will, the provincial or territorial laws decide who gets your belongings. Whether you have a house, savings, or simply cherished personal items, a Will determines where these go.

A Will puts you in control and ensures your wishes are followed.

For parents, a Will is especially crucial. It's where you name guardians for your children and set up financial support for their future.

Making a Will is also an extraordinary chance to support causes you care about. By including a gift to charity, you can create lasting change beyond your lifetime without taking away from your family's inheritance.

Once you have a Will, you'll feel a weight lift off your shoulders. You'll have peace of mind knowing you've taken care of the people and causes you care about. Your final wishes will be clear, saving your loved ones from having to guess what you would have wanted.

Don't wait for "someday." Make your Will a priority today.
Your future self—and your loved ones—will thank you.

"I never thought about creating a Will until I turned 69. Even though I'd helped others plan their legacies, I kept thinking, 'I don't have children or a spouse to leave anything to.' Then I realized my sisters wouldn't need my money, ***but the Red Cross could continue the work my mother believed in."***

– LUCIE PINSONNEAULT

It's Time to Make Your First Will

Creating your Will may seem like a big task, but breaking it down into manageable steps makes the process much simpler. **Here's one way to begin your journey:**

Step 1: Begin With Reflection

Consider what matters most to you. Who are the people you want to provide for? Are there causes or organizations that reflect your values? These fundamental questions will guide your planning process.

Step 2: Take Inventory

List your assets (property, investments, valuables) and **liabilities** (mortgages, loans). This financial snapshot gives you clarity about what your estate will consist of and helps ensure nothing is overlooked.

Step 3: Decide on Beneficiaries

A beneficiary is someone who will receive specific items, cash gifts or a percentage of your remaining estate. If you have dependants, name guardians who share your values and have agreed to this responsibility.

Step 4: Choose Your Executor

Select someone trustworthy to carry out your wishes—often a spouse, adult child, close friend, a corporation or other legal professional. Ensure they live in your province, if possible, and consider naming an alternate executor as a backup.

Step 5: Make It Official

You have several options:

- Hire a lawyer or notary to draft your Will.
- Use online Will-making software.
- Use a Will kit.
- Write a Will yourself (also called a holographic Will).

Step 6: Sign and Store Properly

For your Will to be valid, it must be signed and witnessed according to your province or territory's requirements. Store the original somewhere safe yet accessible to your executor.

Step 7: Review Regularly

Life changes. Review your Will every 3-5 years or after major life events like marriage, divorce, births, deaths, or significant financial changes.

> **Remember, creating your Will is an act of care**—providing for your loved ones and potentially extending your values through charitable gifts. Including the Canadian Red Cross requires just our legal name (The Canadian Red Cross Society) and charitable registration number (11921 9814 RR0001).

*"**Completing my Will gave me peace of mind**—it felt empowering to know everything was in order, that my husband would be protected, and that the choices we made would make things easier for our extended family."*

– CELINE MCGARVEY

My Journey to Peace of Mind

Celine McGarvey, Quebec

When my husband and I started thinking about making our Wills, we put it off at first. Like many people, we thought it would be complicated, expensive and time-consuming.

As planners by nature, we first created a simple handwritten Will stored in a desk drawer. But we knew we needed something more formal as I was about to travel to Ukraine for my work with the Canadian Red Cross.

The Will-making process was surprisingly simple. It started with a questionnaire that guided our thinking. We discussed who would be our executor and how we wanted to distribute our assets. Without children, we chose to include gifts for our nephews, godchildren and for four charities that reflect our values, including the Canadian Red Cross.

Then we met with our professional legal advisor and the appointment itself took just an hour. They explained everything clearly, asked helpful questions we hadn't considered, and sent us a draft to review before finalizing. We had to return one more time to sign the documents.

Now I know that if something happens—whether I'm traveling for work or simply crossing the street—my affairs are in order. I was expecting a headache, but creating our Wills was straightforward and empowering. It's a gift to ourselves and to those we love.

*"We've seen firsthand how the Red Cross remains when other organizations leave. Local Red Cross and Red Crescent societies don't evacuate during crises—**they're there for the long term, part of an international network that fills the need when local institutions can't.**"*

– SHEILA WILSON AND BOB SCHNEIDER

Is Your Will Still Up to Date?

It's a good idea to check your Will from time to time to make sure it still matches what you want. **Life changes, and your Will might need to change too.**

Certain life events should prompt an immediate review:

- Marriage or a new relationship
- Welcoming children or grandchildren
- Separation or divorce
- Moving to another province
- Buying or selling a home
- Retirement
- Loss of a spouse or loved one
- Major financial or asset changes
- Significant changes for beneficiaries

Even if nothing major has changed, experts suggest that it's a good idea to review your Will every 3-5 years. Tax laws can shift, and the people and causes you care about might evolve over time too.

If you need to make changes to your Will, you have two main options:

OPTION 1 Make a New Will

This is best for big changes. Your new Will should clearly state that it cancels all previous Wills. Once signed and witnessed properly, your old Will is no longer valid.

OPTION 2 Add a Codicil

A codicil is a short document that makes small changes to your existing Will. It needs to be signed and witnessed just like your original Will. This works well for simple changes like adding a charity or changing a specific gift amount.

Taking the time to update your Will ensures your final wishes truly reflect your current situation and the legacy you want to leave.

How to Leave a Gift in Your Will to the Canadian Red Cross

When you choose to leave a gift to the Red Cross in your Will, you're making sure people won't face disasters alone. From families who lose their homes in fires to communities caught in conflicts around the world, your kindness will live on and reach those who need it most.

Here's how you can include the Canadian Red Cross in your Will:

1. **Determine how you will make or update your Will** *(options are outlined in Step 5 on page 5 of this guide).*

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2. **Decide what type of gift you want to leave:** a percentage of what's left after caring for your loved ones and all debts have been paid *(gift of residual interest)* or a specific amount of money *(fixed sum gift)*.

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3. Include the type of gift, along with the following information, in your Will when naming beneficiaries:
   - **Legal name:** The Canadian Red Cross Society
   - **Charitable registration number:** 11921 9814 RR0001
   - **Address:** 400 Cooper Street, Suite 8000, Ottawa, Ontario, K2P 2H8

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4. **If you'd like, you can let us know about your gift.** That gives us the chance to thank you and tell you about the benefits of joining our Legacy Circle. We can also learn more about your commitment to the Canadian Red Cross and ensure your wishes are properly carried out.

Did you know? Gifts to charity in your Will can also reduce the taxes your estate will have to pay, leaving more for both your loved ones and the causes you care about.

If you're looking for how you might specifically word a gift in your Will, we also have a helpful Will Wording resource for you. It's important to note that Will requirements vary slightly between provinces and territories, just as personal situations vary. To ensure everything is done correctly, we do recommend that you consult with a professional advisor.

This ensures that even after you're gone, your gift will still bring help to people who need it most—proof that your kindness and compassion never truly end.

A Simple Guide to Creating a Meaningful Will

Making your Will is an important journey, and you're taking the first steps. The next 10 pages of this guide walk you through the key areas to help organize your thoughts, especially if you're going to meet with a professional legal advisor. **Take your time with these early steps as they're the foundation for protecting what matters most to you.**

SECTION 1

Personal Information

To get you thinking about yourself, and who matters in your life, let's start with writing down some basic information.

Your Information

First Name: ______________________ Last Name: ______________________

Street Address: ______________________

City: ______________ Prov: ______________________

Phone Number: ☐ home ☐ cell ☐ work ______________________

Place of Birth (city/province/country): ______________________

Spouse/Partner Information

Marital Status: ☐ single ☐ married ☐ widowed ☐ separated ☐ common law ☐ divorced ☐ remarried

First Name: ______________________ Last Name: ______________________

Date of Birth (day/month/year): ______________________

Child/Grandchild/Next of Kin Information

First Name: ______________________ Last Name: ______________________

Date of Birth (day/month/year): ______________________

Relationship to you: ______________________

First Name: ______________________ Last Name: ______________________

Date of Birth (day/month/year): ______________________

Relationship to you: ______________________

First Name: ______________________ Last Name: ______________________

Date of Birth (day/month/year): ______________________

Relationship to you: ______________________

Emergency Contact

First Name: ______________________ Last Name: ______________________

Phone Number: ☐ home ☐ cell ☐ work ______________________

Personal Reflection

Take a moment to reflect on the values that have guided your life. Which of the Red Cross principles—***Humanity, Impartiality, Neutrality, Independence, Voluntary Service, Unity, or Universality***—resonates most deeply with you? How might you use your Will to help extend these values beyond your lifetime?

URCS

Damien Naylor / IFRC

SECTION 2

Your Finances

Now, take stock of what you own and owe. This simple step shows the full picture of your estate and helps you decide how to share it with the people and causes you care about.

ASSETS

Bank Accounts and Investments

Here, you can compile a list of your assets. This list should include items like your bank account(s), TFSA, investment accounts (stocks, bonds, mutual funds, GICs), RRSP/RRIF, and RESP/RDSP.

Type of Asset: ____________________ Financial Institution: ____________________

Ownership ☐ sole ☐ joint, name of co-owner(s): ____________________

Beneficiary (if applicable): ____________________

Estimated Value: ____________________

Type of Asset: ____________________ Financial Institution: ____________________

Ownership ☐ sole ☐ joint, name of co-owner(s): ____________________

Beneficiary (if applicable): ____________________

Estimated Value: ____________________

Type of Asset: ____________________ Financial Institution: ____________________

Ownership ☐ sole ☐ joint, name of co-owner(s): ____________________

Beneficiary (if applicable): ____________________

Estimated Value: ____________________

Type of Asset: ____________________ Financial Institution: ____________________

Ownership ☐ sole ☐ joint, name of co-owner(s): ____________________

Beneficiary (if applicable): ____________________

Estimated Value: ____________________

Type of Asset: ____________________ Financial Institution: ____________________

Ownership ☐ sole ☐ joint, name of co-owner(s): ____________________

Beneficiary (if applicable): ____________________

Estimated Value: ____________________

Property

Principal residence address: ____________________

Ownership ☐ sole ☐ joint, name of co-owner(s): ____________________

Estimated Value: ____________________

Principal residence address: ____________________

Ownership ☐ sole ☐ joint, name of co-owner(s): ____________________

Estimated Value: ____________________

Principal residence address: ____________________

Ownership ☐ sole ☐ joint, name of co-owner(s): ____________________

Estimated Value: ____________________

Principal residence address: ____________________

Ownership ☐ sole ☐ joint, name of co-owner(s): ____________________

Estimated Value: ____________________

Life Insurance

Type of policy ☐ term life ☐ whole life ☐ universal ______________________

Beneficiary(ies): ______________________

Amount (face amount and cash value, if applicable): ______________________

Type of policy ☐ term life ☐ whole life ☐ universal ______________________

Beneficiary(ies): ______________________

Amount (face amount and cash value, if applicable): ______________________

Type of policy ☐ term life ☐ whole life ☐ universal ______________________

Beneficiary(ies): ______________________

Amount (face amount and cash value, if applicable): ______________________

Pension, Health or Workplace Benefits

List any pension, insurance, or other benefits from current or past employment.

Type of Benefit: ______________________ Company: ______________________

Beneficiary(ies): ______________________

Value: ______________________

Type of Benefit: ______________________ Company: ______________________

Beneficiary(ies): ______________________

Value: ______________________

Type of Benefit: ______________________ Company: ______________________

Beneficiary(ies): ______________________

Value: ______________________

Personal Property or Valuables

Personal property includes items like cars, boats, jewelry, heirlooms, artwork, collections, and household goods. Naming a beneficiary ensures these items go to the right person and helps prevent misunderstandings.

Type of Property: ____________ Location: ____________

Beneficiary(ies): ____________

Value: ____________

Type of Property: ____________ Location: ____________

Beneficiary(ies): ____________

Value: ____________

Type of Property: ____________ Location: ____________

Beneficiary(ies): ____________

Value: ____________

Calculate the total | **Estimated Value of your Assets: $** ____________

SECTION 2

Your Finances, Continued

List your debts and liabilities. Any outstanding loans, credit cards, or other obligations must be paid from your estate before assets are distributed.

DEBTS

Mortgage, Loans, Lines of Credit or Credit Cards

List your assets, including bank accounts, TFSAs, investment accounts (stocks, bonds, mutual funds, GICs), RRSP/RRIF, and RESP/RDSP.

Type of Debt: ____________ Financial Institution: ____________

Estimated Amount Owing: ____________

Type of Debt: ______________________ Financial Institution:

Estimated Amount Owing: ______________________

Type of Debt: ______________________ Financial Institution:

Estimated Amount Owing: ______________________

Calculate the total | **Estimated Total of your Debts: $** ______________________

SECTION 3

Net Worth

Now that you've listed your assets and debts, you can calculate your net worth. This can help you to see what you might be able to pass on—whether to loved ones, friends, or charities you care about most.

Total Assets (from page 10): $ ______________________

Total Assets (from page 12): $ ______________________

Net Worth (Assets – Debts): $ ______________________

Date Completed (dd/mm/yyyy): ______________________

SECTION 4

Guardians for Dependants

Choosing guardians for minor children or dependants is one of the most meaningful parts of making a Will. These individuals will provide care, guidance, and support if you no longer can. Choose people who share your values, have a strong bond with your dependants, and are willing and able to take on this responsibility.

Who Will Need a Guardian: ______________________

Name of Possible Guardian(s): ______________________

SECTION 5

Guardians for Pets

For many people, pets are beloved family members who bring comfort, joy, and companionship. In your Will, you can name a trusted person to provide care for your animals. Consider someone who shares your love of animals, has the capacity to take on this responsibility, and is willing to honour your wishes for their ongoing care and well-being.

Your Pet(s): ______________________________

Name of Possible Caregiver(s): ______________________________

SECTION 6

Naming Your Beneficiaries

Deciding who will inherit your assets is one of the most personal choices in the Will-making process. The individuals and causes you name reflect the relationships, values, and commitments that matter most to you. Thoughtful planning ensures your legacy is shared with care and intention.

You may wish to leave **specific gifts**—particular belongings, sums of money, or items of personal significance—to certain people or organizations. In addition, you can direct who should receive any **residual gifts**, which is everything remaining after debts, taxes, expenses, and specific gifts have been distributed.

	Specific Gift ($ or item identified in Section 3):	**Residual Cash Gift** (%, must total 100%):
Beneficiary Name:		
Beneficiary Name:		
Beneficiary Name:		
Beneficiary Name:		
Beneficiary Name:		
Beneficiary Name:		

SECTION 7

Digital Footprint

Most of us spend part of each day online. Your digital accounts and assets are important to include in your Will. This helps your loved ones know what you have and what you want done with it.

☐ List all online accounts (email, social media, banking, etc.).

☐ Note where photos and important files are stored (cloud or computers).

☐ Identify accounts with monetary value (PayPal, crypto, reward points).

☐ Decide who should access each account after your death.

☐ Record usernames (store passwords securely elsewhere).

☐ Check and set up “legacy contact” options where available.

☐ Tell your executor where to find your digital asset information.

☐ Include instructions for each account (keep, close, or download content).

☐ Identify important digital memories (photos, videos) to pass on.

Location of Important Documents

Keeping your important documents organized, and a record of where they are, ensures your wishes are carried out smoothly and avoids confusion for your executor. Use this checklist to identify key documents and where they are stored.

Important Documents & Locations

ITEM	LOCATION
☐ Safety Deposit Box and Key	
☐ Power of Attorney (Property and Personal Care)	
☐ Funeral Plans, including cemetery plot deeds and/or copy of arrangements)	
☐ Insurance Policies (Life, Health, Home, Auto)	
☐ Property Deeds	
☐ Mortgage Information	
☐ Birth Certificate	
☐ Passport	
☐ Social Insurance Card	
☐ Marriage/Separation/Divorce Certificate	
☐ Citizenship Papers	
☐ Bank Accounts & Investment Info	
☐ Income Tax Returns	
☐ Digital Asset Instructions	
☐ Other Important Documents	

What to do Once Your Will is Written

Writing your Will is a big achievement. Congratulations on reaching this milestone! Now that you've made these important decisions, there are just a few final actions to take to ensure your plan is executed as you'd like. **Here's what you should do next:**

Step 1: Give Your Executor a Copy

Make sure the person you named as your executor knows they are responsible for carrying out your Will. Provide them with a copy so they understand your wishes and can access it when needed.

Step 2: Inform Family and Loved Ones

Let your close family or other loved ones know that a Will exists and where it is stored. This helps prevent confusion, disputes, or surprises after your passing.

Step 3: Notify Charities

If you have left a gift in your Will for a charity, do consider informing them in advance. This allows the charity to plan for your donation, use it effectively, and acknowledge your gift in a way that honours your intentions.

Step 4: Store Your Original Will Safely

Keep the signed original document in a secure location, such as a fireproof safe, safety deposit box, or with your lawyer, and ensure your executor knows how to access it.

Step 5: Revisit Your Will Regularly

Life changes like marriage, divorce, children, or new assets may require updates. Review your Will every 3 to 5 years to make sure it reflects your current wishes and life circumstances.

Other Legacy Giving Options

Beyond including a gift in your Will, there are several other ways you can make a legacy gift to the Canadian Red Cross.

- **Life Insurance:**
You can name the Red Cross as a beneficiary of your policy or transfer ownership of a policy you no longer need. This creates a significant future gift while possibly giving you immediate tax benefits.

- **RRSPs and RRIF:**
By naming the Red Cross as a beneficiary of your retirement savings, you can make a substantial impact and potentially reduce the tax burden on your estate.

- **TFSA:**
Your Tax-Free Savings Account can become a powerful giving tool by designating the Red Cross as a beneficiary.

Each option offers different advantages.

We recommend that you speak with a professional advisor about which might work best alongside your gift in Will plans.
When you are ready to proceed, do reach out to a member of our Legacy & Gift Planning Team.


Canadian
Red Cross
Croix-Rouge
canadienne
REDCROSS.CA
ELAINE
FISHER

If you decide to include a gift in your Will for the Canadian Red Cross, please let us know. We would like to thank you for this very special gift, and ensure that we honour your wishes when the time comes. If you have any questions, we're here to help.

Legal Name: The Canadian Red Cross Society
Address: 8000-400 Cooper St, Ottawa, ON K2P 2H8
Registered charity number: 119219814 RR0001

redcross.ca/legacy
wecare@redcross.ca
1-800-418-1111