Managing your estate planning during lockdown

29 June 2020 - In 2019, the Master of the High Court confirmed that as many as 75% of estates reported, are for South Africans who died without a valid Will. However, Johan Strydom, Head of Growth at FNB Fiduciary says that this may be set to change as people become more aware of their own mortality under the COVID-19 lockdown.

“We have seen significant interest from clients who want to draw up or revise their Wills especially through our online Will facility during the lockdown period,” he says. Strydom notes that one of the major hiccups that citizens faced during this period was the complication around executing a Will according to legislative requirements. “You are required to sign your Will with two witnesses present, who are not your beneficiaries nominated in the Will. Unfortunately, most people were in many instances likely to be locked down with their beneficiaries. And if they did sign as witnesses, that would legally disqualify them as beneficiaries,” he explains.

Strydom says, “FNB is encouraging clients to deal with their financial and legacy planning during the various stages of lockdown. We encourage people to start drafting or reviewing their existing Wills and then finalise the signing of the Will as soon as possible.” The process of completing a Will online via FNB online banking is simple and can be completed within minutes. Once complete, you will receive an email from FNB with a draft copy of the Will for you to sign with two independent witnesses, and a personal inventory form where you can list all your assets including your insurance policies and the option to have your Will stored with FNB.
Dying without a Will is referred to as dying intestate; simply put, without a Will, you have no say about how your assets are distributed after death.

A Will plays an important role in protecting those dependants such as your parents, extended family, and other potential beneficiaries. Without a Will and provision for a testamentary trust, the inheritance of minor children will go to the Guardian’s Fund administered by the Master of the High Court until they turn 18 years old.

**Estates administration under lockdown**

The turnaround times for the administration of deceased estates to be finalised are likely to be impacted by the various stages of lockdown. The Master of the High Court continuously provide updates on how the lockdown is affecting their services. Backlogs will be experienced as various institutions, which plays an important part in the administration of deceased estates, were under lock down over the past two months.

“As we continue to adapt to a new normal, making sure you have a Will and your estate planning in order has never been more important,” Strydom concludes.

**ENDS**

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