



## **Joint Media Statement**

### **Australian Workers Union**

### **Australian Funeral Directors Association**

The AWU and AFDA call on the federal and state governments to ensure that, in the event of a lockdown, the funeral services and ancillary industries are assured essential status and continue to operate.

It is commonplace to pitch funeral services as a singular ceremonial service offering, providing families and friends a dignified grieving ceremony. Yet while the industry's role in aiding the grieving process is important, it also oversees a critical health service integrated within the broader health system.

When someone dies, the same workers who conduct ceremonies are typically also the ones who provide essential transportation and coordination of the deceased. This includes collecting deceased remains from homes and hospitals at any hour of the day, transporting them to and from morgues, and facilitating the burial or cremation services.

These services cannot simply be substituted by the health system. It is the funeral services industry that own and operate most of the required vehicles and site infrastructure to facilitate the collection, preparation, transportation and facilitation of a burial or cremation service. In particular, it is the funeral services industry with its professional expertise, that can execute this process in a timely, safe (infection control) and dignified manner.

Without the funeral services industry operating freely major public health risks are created.



This is particularly important in regional areas, where the funeral industry is critical to transporting the deceased across state borders, as well as dealing with health authorities.

Another critical function of the industry is the ongoing production of coffin-making. Approximately 95 per cent of caskets are manufactured in Australia, and without their manufacture Australia would imminently see a shortage, having cemeteries and crematoria unable to fulfil their crucial role during a critical time.

Without the production of coffins, the deceased would have to be buried without a casket, cremated without a casket, or worse, not buried at all. For the funeral services industry to continue operating, this aspect of the supply chain must continue to operate.

The announced restrictions on funeral service attendance of ten or less people is a reasonable and safe compromise. The AWU and AFDA call on employers and workers within the sector to work with government to ensure the health and safety of workplaces for families who will require them to pay respects during this challenging period. This should involve a consultative, best practice approach to ensure the community can pay their respects in a safe environment.

The death rate is likely to rise during this pandemic. During these times, it is crucial for the national psyche that Australians continue to be able to pay their respect in a dignified manner. The passing of someone we cherish, and the celebration of their life is difficult at the best of times. To lose the ability to say goodbye would compound further the untold grief many Australian families will experience.

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