



AUSTRALIAN FUNERAL DIRECTORS ASSOCIATION

1 April 2020

The Hon Scott Morrison
Prime Minister of Australia
Parliament House
Canberra ACT 2600

The importance of funerals to mental health

Dear Prime Minister,

Commendation to the National Cabinet – funeral gathering baseline

Acknowledging the primacy of slowing the spread of the virus, the Australian Funeral Directors Association (AFDA) on behalf of our members and client families, commends and thanks the Prime Minister and the National Cabinet for allowing a baseline of 10 attendees at funerals. The ability for immediate family to be together, support one another and express their emotions in the presence of their loved one is of untold benefit to people experiencing grief. Allowing the limited continuation of funeral gatherings also avoids the mental health consequences of an inability to mourn a death.

AFDA peak body – funeral sector’s COVID-19 mission

AFDA is the peak body of the funerals sector with members in every State and Territory, representing more than 60% of deaths in Australia.

During the COVID-19 period, AFDA’s mission is to:

- Educate the community and funeral directors about the importance of managing and complying with the 10 person funeral gathering limit.
- Seek essential services status for the funeral industry.
- Educate the community and funeral directors about what “is” possible to celebrate a life and mourn a death.
- Seek bereavement payment assistance for people registered with Services Australia in need of income support.

Request for essential services status

Essential services status for the funeral industry would give comfort to the community as:

- Ready access is needed to PPE which is in short supply, such as masks.
- If the funeral sector workforce is depleted due to contraction of the virus, self-isolation or the need to care for another (including a child), there will be insufficient staff to transfer, bury or cremate deceased.
- “Funeral industry” is defined in the Funeral Award 2010 to mean “the provision of funeral services, coffin manufacturing, the removal of deceased human remains and any ancillary services”. Critical suppliers such as coffin manufacturers, PPE and ancillary suppliers, crematorium and burial staff need to function despite self-isolation requirements in order to avoid shortages of coffins and in order to ensure there are no backlogs of burials or cremations.

Promoting

professional

funeral standards

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- Confidence in freedom of movement for the purposes of funeral related tasks, such as the transfer of deceased from one town/region/state to another.

Extension of the Services Australia (Centrelink) Bereavement Payment to all registrants

During the next 4-6 months, a number of people who die will be registered with Services Australia in need of income support. Pressure on mental health and personal finances will be ameliorated by government intervention and assistance to help fund reasonable funeral expenses where funds are limited or non-existent. Currently, a lump sum 14 week bereavement payment to the survivor of a couple on the pension is administered by Services Australia. AFDA suggests extending the eligibility criteria for this payment to all Services Australia registrants in need of income support or their next of kin in the same position. The bereavement payment benefit is already in place with Services Australia for specific categories of pension recipients.

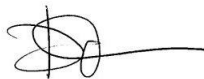
Prime Minister, AFDA commends and thanks you and the National Cabinet for balancing the needs of grieving families during this period and we urge attention be given to:

- the funeral industry's essential services status; and
- the need for Government assistance with funeral expenses during the next 4-6 months for people registered with Services Australia who are in need of income support.

Yours faithfully,



**Andrew Pinder
National President
Australian Funeral Directors Association**



**Dale Gilson
Chief Executive Officer
Australian Funeral Directors Association**

cc

The Hon Michael McCormack, Deputy Prime Minister
 The Hon Josh Frydenberg, Treasurer
 The Hon Greg Hunt, Minister for Health
 Prof Brendan Murphy, Chief Medical Officer
 The Hon Andrew Barr, Chief Minister of Australian Capital Territory
 The Hon Rachel Stephen-Smith, ACT Minister for Health
 The Hon Gladys Berejiklian, Premier of New South Wales
 The Hon Brad Hazzard, NSW Minister for Health
 The Hon Daniel Andrews, Premier of Victoria
 The Hon Jenny Mikakos, VIC Minister for Health
 The Hon Anastacia Palaszczuk, Premier of Queensland
 The Hon Dr Steven Miles, QLD Minister for Health
 The Hon Peter Gutwein, Premier of Tasmania
 The Hon Sarah Courtney, TAS Minister for Health
 The Hon Mark McGowan, Premier of Western Australia
 The Hon Roger Cook, WA Minister for Health
 The Hon Steven Marshall, Premier of South Australia
 The Hon Stephen Wade, SA Minister for Health
 The Hon Michael Gunner, Chief Minister of Northern Territory
 The Hon Natasha Fyles, NT Minister for Health