

Cost of living is now extending to the cost of...

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Cost of living is now extending to the cost of dying

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From July 1, the cost of burying a loved one in NSW will rise by \$156 – even if you’ve bought a prepaid funeral. Cremating a loved one will cost an extra \$41, with an additional fee of \$63 if you then want to put their ashes in a memorial.

At a time when everyone is struggling with rising costs, the NSW government, which campaigned on cost-of-living relief, is going it alone among the states to introduce what some are calling a death tax.

While there will be exceptions – burials of children and, for now, burials by smaller funeral providers handling fewer than 50 a year – the new interment services levy (ISL) will apply to nearly every burial and cremation from July 1 this year. From July 1 next year, it will be extended to every burial and cremation.

And as the ISL is levied on burials

and cremations – not funerals – it won’t be covered by any prepaid funeral plan taken out before July 1.

The industry has had the opportunity to engage with the NSW government on this issue, and welcomes further chances to put its

case in the weeks ahead. The government has, at least, been upfront about the purpose of the levy: to fund its new regulator, Cemeteries and Crematoria NSW (CCNSW).

No one argues that our industry should not strive to achieve the highest standards, and be held to account. Causing concern is the haste and the application of the ISL.

While the ISL will be levied on the operators of crematoria, cemeteries and memorial parks, it will be passed on to consumers in the form of itemised amounts on funeral bills.

With Queensland moving to cut cost-of-living expenses through measures such as halving public transport fees, NSW is going the

other way. The least the NSW government can do is wait until these cost pressures ease.

In addition, there is just four weeks from the formal announcement of the start of the ISL and its

implementation for most funeral services providers. This time frame is too tight to allow our members, the majority of which are small and family-owned businesses, to put in place the necessary processes to comply.

We have also raised concerns about the extension of the ISL to include previously exempt private sector cemetery and crematorium operators, with the government and CCNSW failing to adequately detail

the problems this extra regulation is supposed to address. It has not made the case for how a new tax on consumers will improve the CCNSW.

Finally, we have raised the unfairness of the double dipping of fees for those who chose to have their family members cremated and the ashes then interred in a memorial – a total of \$104. Surely the ISL should be charged only on cremations.

Our members are committed to the highest standards of care for bereaved families. Hitting them with an increased bill – particularly now – is not the way to go about it.

Asha Dooley, of Grace Funerals, is president of the Australian Funeral Directors Association in NSW/ACT