

18 February 2021

Good news but not out of the woods yet

Following its media release on Monday, The Funeral Directors Association has today welcomed the reduction in alert levels and provided an update on discussions with the Ministry of Health over essential health worker status.

“Yesterday’s announcement is great news for grieving families across New Zealand.” said Gary Taylor, President of the Funeral Directors Association, “Our members can now work with families to replan the meaningful farewells that were postponed during the Level 3 and Level 2 lockdowns in the first half of the week.” The Funeral Directors Association estimates that over 200 funerals will need to be replanned across New Zealand as a result of the lockdowns.

“Even with the reduced alert levels, larger funerals will still be limited to 100 in Auckland and there is limited space to accommodate postponed funerals with the other funerals already arranged for the rest of this week.” Taylor said. “We anticipate that many families will need to postpone until next week and our members are working hard to contact all those families impacted and provide options for them.”

The Funeral Directors Association has stated that no family should be concerned about timing or space and should talk to their member firm as soon as possible so that suitable arrangements can be made. “Our members have been here before and are well versed in providing the best possible advice and service to families at a very difficult time,” said Taylor “and we do not want anyone to feel they can’t call for help when facing the loss of a loved one, no matter what alert level we are in.” The Funeral Directors Association website has a link to find a qualified funeral director that meets the Association’s standards for best practice.

“We have also had good news from the Ministry of Health but there is still more work to do on the classification of funeral directors as essential health workers,” said David Moger, CEO of the Funeral Directors Association, “as we have been granted a class exemption for travel by the Ministry which will make it easier for us in event of any future Covid19 travel borders, but we have not yet been reclassified as essential health workers.”

Funeral directors are classified as essential workers but not essential health workers which has implications for funeral directors to work safely to support grieving families in a pandemic environment. Essential health worker classification would provide funeral directors with access to Government PPE stores and earlier positioning in the upcoming vaccination programme.

“Our members supply their own PPE which is vital to keep them and the families they serve safe but if supplies run short, we need access to the Government supplies as much as GPs, community nurses and midwives do when they are working in the community.” Said Moger “Our current classification does not recognise that death is a part of life and care for the grieving and the deceased is just as important as all the other health services.” Funeral directors operate as businesses that do not receive funding from any part of the health system but provide vital health related services at what is arguably the most difficult phase of life. “William Gladstone said “Show me the manner in which a nation cares for its dead and I will measure with mathematical exactness, the tender mercy of its people, their respect for the law of the land and their loyalty to high ideals.”” Said Moger, “so classifying death as part of the health system is the most powerful way of showing kindness to all New Zealanders as part of our new normal.”

“The reclassification is also vital as we look at the upcoming vaccination programme” Moger continued, “as our members need to know they are safe and the families that we serve need to know that the person coming into their home to assist them manage a very emotional time is also vaccinated. We should not have to deal with a case of Covid19 contracted or passed on by an unvaccinated funeral director simply because of being on the wrong list.”

On the 30th November 2020, Funeral Directors Association leaders and members attended a hui in Wellington organised by the Ministry of Health. “The key takeaway from that hui was the need to reclassify us as essential health workers, “said Taylor, “and with Dr Bloomfield’s support for our class exemption very helpfully fast-tracked, I have today asked him for his support in achieving that change as soon as possible so we can continue to make our full contribution as part of the team of 5 million.”

ENDS

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Funeral Directors
ASSOCIATION OF NZ

The Funeral Directors Association of New Zealand represents funeral directing companies that undertake the majority of funerals in New Zealand. They are a group of caring professionals who are committed to ensuring that the families they serve receive high-quality funeral service. For more information, visit our website: www.funeraldirectors.co.nz