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NEW RESEARCH HIGHLIGHTS THE IMPACT OF COVID-19 ON FUNERAL INDUSTRY

The Australian Funeral Directors Association (AFDA) has published its second *Funeral Industry Trends Report*. Unique to this report, in addition to key trends, is an exploration of the valuable contribution of the Australian funeral industry and its staff based largely on survey data gathered by McCrindle Research.

Social researcher Mark McCrindle said the report has an important story to tell. The funeral industry and its staff play an essential role in helping people through what is often one of the most difficult times of their lives.

Key findings of the report were:

- 91% of funeral industry staff in Australia find working in the funeral industry extremely/very rewarding
- 87% of funeral industry staff enjoy helping families and loved ones during a difficult time
- 84% of funeral industry staff feel like they are making a positive difference for people
- Providing comfort to grieving families accounts for a sizeable portion of their day-to-day work life (56%)
- 80% of funeral industry staff believe they are making an extremely/very positive impact in their local community.

COVID-19 and its associated restrictions were also included, providing crucial insights into the ways in which the pandemic affected the funeral industry and its staff.

Key challenges experienced were:

- 81% of funeral industry staff found imposing restrictions on funeral attendees the biggest challenge
- Dealing with families who are under high levels of stress and anxiety (65%)
- Cancelling and rescheduling funerals due to lockdowns and restrictions (56%)

Professor Liz Lobb, National COVID-19 Bereavement Project said, “The pandemic has much further reach than the disease itself, this impacts deeply, how people grieve. Notably, social distancing, personal protective equipment requirements, border closures, limits on visitors/ attendees and reduced physical contact at funerals. The subsequent impact of these challenges during unprecedented times is what many researchers are referring to now as the ‘silent pandemic of grief’.”

AFDA CEO, Dale Gilson said, the funeral industry continues to play an essential role in guiding Australians through grief and loss, perhaps now more than ever.

“Funeral industry workers are frontline. Every person who dies needs to be transferred, and even with depleted staffing levels, everyone has a funeral of some kind. Those staff who remain, and are not in isolation, or have COVID-19 themselves, are absorbing additional workloads above the norm.”

The report also explores changes and trends in how people farewell their loved ones. 44% of funerals were livestreamed in August 2021 to January 2022, compared to 36% in February 2021 to July 2021, indicating that even as restrictions ease, the pandemic has accelerated trends in the funeral industry.

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