

**The Pineapple Project asked the Australian Funeral Directors Association to provide a response to the points made by Saimi Jeong from Choice in this episode. This edited response is from AFDA's National President, Andrew Pinder:**

AFDA is the sector's largest association and represents funeral directors in every state and territory. AFDA is a public company, limited by guarantee, which is administered by an elected Board.

AFDA members are subject to comprehensive minimum standards to become, and retain membership including complying with a Code of Conduct, a Code of Ethics, three yearly audits of funeral infrastructure (premises, equipment and vehicles) and achieving a yearly minimum of continuing professional development for staff.

AFDA's Code of Conduct is established by the organisation's board.

AFDA's standards include but are not limited to:

- providing itemised costings up front
- no surprises with charges after a service is delivered
- use of a hygienic mortuary
- dignified storage facilities for the deceased.

### **On funeral directors and pricing transparency**

AFDA fully supports transparency in funeral pricing. AFDA's Code of Ethics and Practice requires that itemised costs estimates are provided to client families up front, before the client engages the AFDA member firm. There should never be surprises with funeral pricing and in particular, never after a service has been provided. The problems with a lack of price transparency elicited in the CHOICE report should not occur with an AFDA member funeral director.

Regarding the price range provided by ABC, \$1,200 would be for an 'unattended cremation', which does not involve a funeral service at all, whereas \$5,600 could be for a multi-venue funeral service involving a viewing the evening before the funeral, followed by a funeral service, refreshments and then a burial. This type of funeral can be spread over multiple days and the final ceremony can take an entire day. The multi-venue funeral service fee would often include preparation of the deceased for viewing, viewing time in a chapel or external venue, vehicles, staff and equipment for a service, followed by vehicles, staff and equipment at a cemetery or crematorium.

**Re: coffins**

It is important that families have a choice from a wide selection of coffins from low-cost, to mid-range, to high-end to meet their individual preferences. Some coffins are made from particle board, or Medium Density Fibreboard (MDF) and others are made from timber or metal. The price of a coffin is generally determined by the material from which it is made. Timber and metal are more expensive than particle board or MDF. Different cultures have their own requirements for coffins.

Funeral homes mark-up the price of coffins similarly to any business that sells merchandise. Many funeral directors hold tens of thousands of dollars of coffins in stock to be able to immediately provide the selection a family has made in time for the funeral. Many coffins are purchased from the manufacturer before handles and linings are added. Funeral Directors provide staff to attach handles, linings, name-plates and religious ornamentation, all of which are included in the price of a coffin.

### **Re: professional service fee**

In theory, funeral directors could charge for their professional service to families by the hour. Rather than an hourly charge for the many tasks performed by the funeral director on the family's behalf, funeral directors generally apply a fixed Professional Service fee. This gives the family visibility and certainty of the funeral director's charges prior to engaging the funeral director, often irrespective of the length of time the family requires the funeral director to assist them, irrespective of how long it takes the family to make decisions or the number of occasions they change their minds before ensuring the funeral plans are exactly to their wishes, and irrespective of the length of the funeral. It also helps ensure that families spend the amount of time needed with a funeral director to give effect to their wishes rather than feel they are being charged for each module of time, when they are distressed and grieving.

### **Re: viewings and cost variance**

AFDA members have their premises and equipment audited every three years to ensure professional standards are met. AFDA members often invest significantly in their mortuary infrastructure. Mortuaries with appropriate mortuary equipment require significant investment. Preparation of a deceased person is performed by trained morticians or embalmers. Preparation for viewing takes time and usually requires the use of mortuary products. Some funeral directors absorb these costs and provide a viewing at no additional cost to their Professional Service fee and other funeral directors may charge separately.