



Annual Report for year ending  
March 31, 2019



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## Who we are

The Alberta Funeral Services Regulatory Board (AFSRB) is Alberta's funeral industry regulator. The AFSRB is an independent delegated regulatory authority and is accountable to the Government of Alberta through delegation documents and a memorandum of agreement with the Minister of Service Alberta.

The Alberta Funeral Services Regulatory Board was established December 1, 1992 under the following *legislation*:

*Licensing of Trades and Businesses Act*  
*Funeral Services Business Licensing Regulation (AR 360/92)*  
*Alberta Funeral Services Regulatory Board Regulation (AR 225/98).*

In 2002 – 2003 the Board was delegated responsibility for enforcing and administering the following legislation:

*Funeral Services Act*  
*Funeral Services Exemption Regulation*  
*Funeral Services General Regulation, and*  
*Crematory Regulation under the Cemeteries Act.*

The Board has six members. Three of the six members are elected by funeral services businesses to represent the interests of the funeral services industry and three members are appointed by the Minister of Service Alberta to represent the interests of the public.

### 2018 – 2019 Board Members

Jeff Hagel – Chair (Industry member)  
Barbara McKinley – Vice Chair (Public member)  
Scott Barbour - Treasurer (Industry member)  
Shawn Feist – Industry member  
Wendy Lickacz - Public member  
Debbie Miller – Public member (appointed on October 30, 2018)

### Board Staff

Executive Director	Karen Carruthers
Board Inspector	Del August
Administrative Assistant	Lori Elanik

Auditors     Hahn Lukey Houle LLP

# **2018-2019 Highlights**

The past year has been very productive for the AFSRB. There has been time to reflect on the direction of the AFSRB and steps taken to move the Board towards the goal of increased modernization. Below are a few highlights of the past year.

## **Operational Review**

In October of 2018, Service Alberta completed an Operational Review of the AFSRB. There were a number of recommendations provided by the Compliance and Accountability unit in this report which has provided a focus for the Board members and the Executive Director.

## **Business Plan**

The AFSRB hired a consultant to work through the process of revising the format and updating the content of the business plan. The business plan is now clearly laid out with specific goals and measurable performance measures. It has been made more concise by removing many of the operational details that were too specific for a business plan. The Board also revisited and revised or discarded the goals from the 2018-2021 Business Plan. This has confirmed the resolve to move forward

## **Computer licensing system**

The AFSRB hired a consultant to guide them through the Request for Proposal (RFP) process in order to obtain a supplier who had the ability to build a computer system to be used for licensing, complaint tracking and inspection logs. At the end of the fiscal year, the RFP process had yielded a potential supplier, reference checks were completed, and the Board will be reviewing the proposal and making a decision in early April 2019. The new system will modernize the work process in the office and create efficiencies and tracking options that weren't previously available.

## **New office location**

In July of 2018, the AFSRB moved its location to a new office in Sherwood Park. This has proven to be a beneficial move. The Board office now has more space including its own boardroom and storage area, there is ample parking, it is on a main floor for greater accessibility, and it is located near major routes.

## Message from the Chair

On behalf of the Alberta Funeral Services Regulatory Board (AFSRB), I am pleased to present the 2019 Annual Report. This report covers information regarding the operation of the AFSRB from April 1, 2018 to March 31, 2019.

2018-2019 has been a very exciting year, filled with significant accomplishments for the AFSRB and I am very proud of the AFSRB Board and staff. In summarizing our work over this past year, two main themes have emerged: Governance and Modernization.

In October 2018, Service Alberta completed an operational review and made recommendations regarding our work. We have implemented several of these recommendations and have begun a project to strengthen our governance practices through training and policy development.

The Board also developed a new three-year Business Plan which reflects our mission and purpose of promoting a fair and informed marketplace, protecting consumer rights, enhancing professionalism amongst funeral service providers and maintaining public trust and confidence in the industry.

We have made great strides in modernizing our systems and processes by identifying a supplier to begin building a new website as well as a new computer system for licensing, complaint processing and inspections. This new system will mitigate the risks of having only manual processes and of failing technology and will allow for a more comprehensive overview of the industry. We also look forward to greater efficiency in the office once the new system is in place.

In July 2018, the Board moved its office to a new location in Sherwood Park. We now have more space for meetings, offices and storage. Thanks to our Executive Director, Karen Carruthers, the move was seamless and did not result in any disruption to Board operations.

In October 2018, Service Alberta appointed Debbie Miller as a new public member to the Board and Dean Ross came onto the Board as a new industry representative. We welcome these new members, who bring a wealth of knowledge and experience to our organization, and we look forward to working with them.

I would like to thank past and present Board members for their insight and commitment to our work. On behalf of the AFSRB, I would also like to thank the Executive Director, Karen Carruthers, and staff members Lori Elanik and Del August for their hard work and dedication to professionalism. I look forward to our work in the years to come.

Barbara McKinley  
Chair

# **AFSRB Overview**

## **Funding**

The AFSRB is a public agency under the Government of Alberta and is funded by the collection of business licensing fees, individual funeral professional licensing fees and the per call fee due from each funeral service provided.

## **Objective**

Prior to the fiscal year end, the AFSRB undertook to review and revise our vision, mission and mandate statements to more clearly reflect the importance of consumer protection within the AFSRB's role.

### **Vision**

Complete public trust and confidence in Alberta's funeral service professionals.

### **Mission Statement**

Promote a fair and informed marketplace by protecting consumer rights, enhancing industry professionalism, maintaining rigorous educational standards and enforcing fair business practices.

### **Mandate**

To achieve its mission, the AFSRB engages in two core businesses:

Promote consumer protection in a fair and informed marketplace. Facilitate excellence in funeral services through education, training and standards. The AFSRB works to ensure that both licensees and consumers understand their rights and obligations within the legislative framework and Code of Conduct.

Maintain vigilance over the industry. Protect the public interest by ensuring fair and ethical conduct in the marketplace, through the impartial delivery of licensing, inspection and enforcement activities. Responding to issues and threats as they arise, the AFSRB monitors the emergence of trends within the funeral sector.

## **Enforcement**

The AFSRB has the power to enforce The Funeral Services Act and Regulations and the Crematory Regulation under the Cemeteries Act.

When the Act or Regulations have been contravened, the AFSRB has the authority to:

- suspend or cancel a licence
- refuse to issue or renew a licence
- apply an administrative penalty
- initiate a prosecution through the court system

# VALUES AND PRINCIPLES FOR SERVICE EXCELLENCE

The AFSRB members and staff are dedicated to ensuring a standard of excellence in the funeral services that are provided to Albertans. To succeed in this mission, planning and operations will be guided by the following principles:

- ✓ **Accuracy and Professionalism.** We provide timely and accurate information about funeral services. Our communications are based on respect, honesty, and objectivity.
- ✓ **Accessibility.** We give timely responses to requests for information and concerns about marketplace conduct.
- ✓ **Accountability.** We are responsible to the people of Alberta, through the Minister of Service Alberta, for appropriate business conduct occurring in the marketplace.
- ✓ **Human Resource Management.** We strive to be respected for our knowledge and skills, and our effective administration of a legislative framework.
- ✓ **Emerging issues.** We monitor funeral services trends and emerging issues and provide leadership to ensure that funeral services continue to respond to consumer needs.
- ✓ **Service Excellence.** A set of Core Competencies has been developed for funeral professionals. The primary intention of the competency profile is to ensure that all education and training programs that lead to candidates being considered for licensing as a Funeral Director, Embalmer and/or Pre-Need Salesperson meet a high and consistent standard. All educational programming is expected to demonstrate training components that reflect the elements of the competencies.
- ✓ **Consultation with stakeholders.** We seek input from consumers, funeral services businesses, and other stakeholders, including various government departments, regarding decisions that affect satisfactory delivery of funeral services in Alberta.

# Report on Operations

The Alberta Funeral Services Regulatory Board administers legislation that promotes and enforces fair business practices designed to encourage consumer confidence in Alberta.

## Licensing

The number of licences issued over the past 3 years have remained quite consistent with only minimal variations. This speaks to the stability of funeral services industry and the funeral professionals who staff it. The licence with the highest fluctuation in the numbers, the pre-need salesperson licence, is the position within the funeral services businesses that has the greatest turnover in staff.

In the fiscal year 2018-2019, there were no licences refused.



## Pre-need monitoring

It was noted during the Operational Review, that some of the pre-need files required additional follow up. Many of the files in question simply needed a letter to confirm that the AFSRB had received and accepted their filing with no further action required. There were a few pre-need files that required follow up as the funeral services business had not provided the additional information requested by the AFSRB. At year-end, all of these businesses had been contacted and all information brought up to date. The majority of the files have either no issues or minor issues unrelated to the funds held in trust (such as late submission date, missing documents, etc). The one significant issue that the AFSRB found, was a new funeral services business (operating less than one year) did not put the money in trust from two pre-need contracts (the only two that they held). The AFSRB suspended their pre-need business licence for a period of 5 years, and the business voluntarily cancelled the two pre-need contracts and refunded the money to the purchasers.

## Inspections

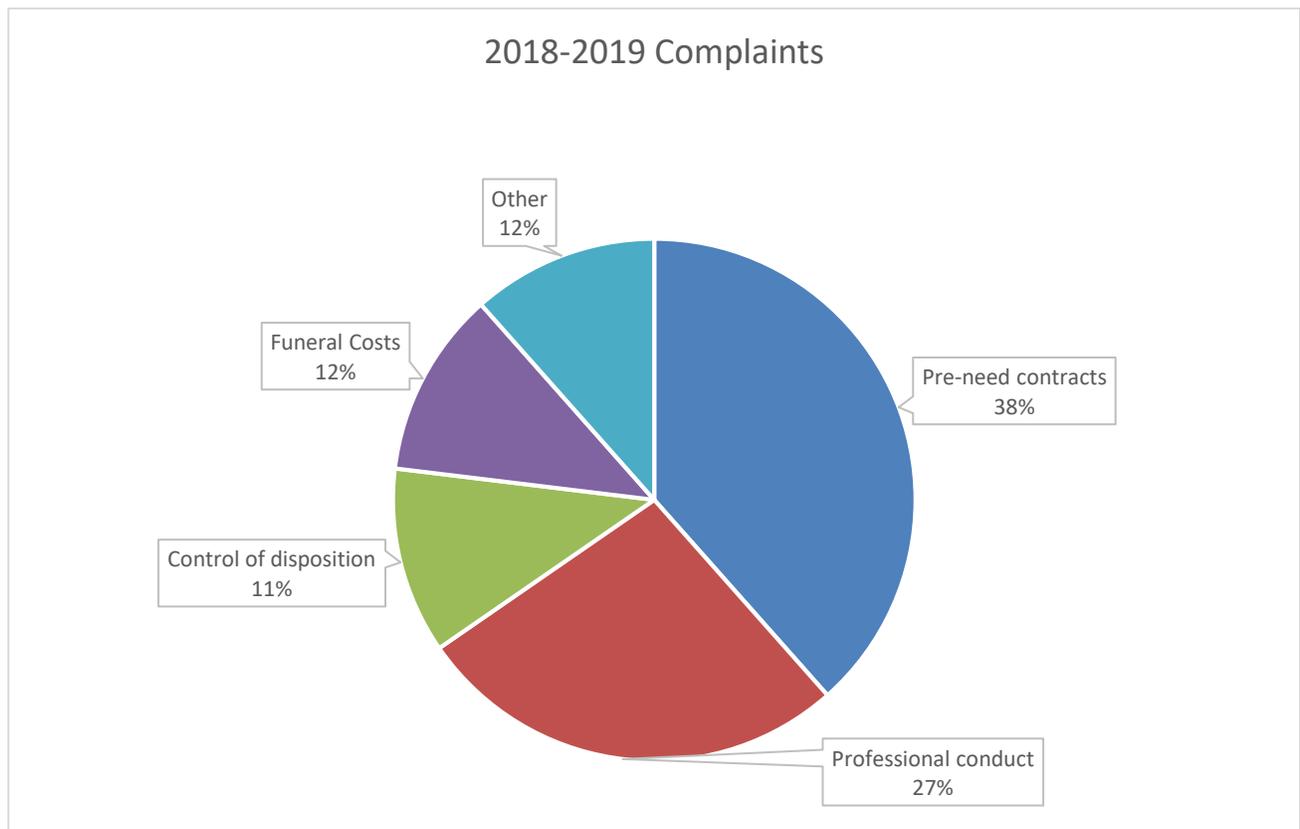
Inspections are required to be carried out on each funeral services business once every three years. As the inspector was new to the AFSRB, it was believed to be beneficial for him to inspect all businesses this year, and there were still some outstanding issues that required additional follow up, so it made sense for all businesses to be inspected. The Inspector completed inspections on 157 funeral services businesses and 53 crematories.

## Complaints

Considering that there are approximately 25,000 deaths in the Province of Alberta, the number of complaints received is very small.

There were 26 complaints received by the AFSRB between April 1, 2018 and March 31, 2019. The average timeframe to conclude a complaint was 28 days.

There were a variety of issues outlined in the complaints. The highest number of complaints was regarding pre-need contracts which includes concerns with pricing, clarity of charges and pre-purchased goods misplaced. The second highest complaint was regarding professional conduct which includes concerns about quality of embalming, perceived disrespectful conduct of funeral professionals, and poor business practices.



# Protecting Consumers

## Website

The Board's website, [www.afsrb.ab.ca](http://www.afsrb.ab.ca), enables Albertans to find the information they need to make informed decisions when they are planning or arranging a funeral. It provides information on the funeral services businesses in their area. The website is currently being totally rebuilt in order to be more user friendly and to include more information specifically for consumers. The new website will also ensure that the information can be easily viewed on smart phones and other electronic devices.

## Publication

The Board provides funeral service information to consumers through our brochure, *Funeral Planning in Alberta*. This brochure is provided to the funeral services businesses and the businesses in turn provide the brochures to consumers. This brochure has also been provided to municipal offices across the province to provide to the public. Members of the public can request free copies of the brochure from the AFSRB office.

## Information sessions

The Executive Director provides information sessions to groups who make a request to the AFSRB office. These sessions are provided at no cost and include copies of the *Funeral Planning in Alberta* brochure for all attendees. Generally, these sessions have taken place in different locations in Edmonton, as this is where the requests have come from. In 2018-2019, there were two information sessions provided to care facilities in the Edmonton area.

The AFSRB is looking at ways to expand the reach of these sessions to include a variety of areas throughout the province and has included this as a goal in the current business plan.

## Responding to inquiries

The Board office fielded more than 1400 phone calls and 15,000 emails, which included questions, concerns and clarifications from consumers and industry members. Our goal is to respond efficiently and effectively to all inquiries that are directed to the AFSRB. Even when the inquiry does not fall under the jurisdiction of the AFSRB, an alternative source for the information being sought is provided (where possible).

## Continuing Education for funeral professionals

The AFSRB retains responsibility for ensuring licensees are current in their knowledge of legislation and funeral practices. 2018-2019 was the end of the three-year cycle when all funeral professionals were required to submit their continuing education requirements. Each funeral professional must obtain at least 12 credits of continuing education hours, including the three-credit mandatory course determined by the AFSRB which for this cycle was a joint effort between the AFSRB and Alberta Health Services. This course was to remind all funeral professionals about proper processes for handling a deceased person to ensure the safety of the public and the funeral services business staff including the proper use of Personal Protective Equipment (PPE).

The AFSRB also implemented a new reporting process for continuing education requirements where each licensee is required to justify the value of the continuing education that they have taken by aligning it with the applicable Core Competency. A Core Competency Profile has been implemented by the AFSRB to provide focus and attention to the competencies important for a funeral professional. The four core competencies established for the funeral service professionals are as follows: Business Practice (setting priorities, time and team management, administrative duties, business responsibilities); Communication (including understanding the psychology of grief, mediation, conflicts resolution, and general communication); Professionalism (appearance and demeanor, legal and ethical demands, participation in professional organizations and activities and self-care); and Technical Expectations (including, in addition to the usual technical skills, understanding customs and rituals, social media, digital presentations and graphic design).

### AFSRB Collaborative partners

The Board works with a number of entities to stay current with trends and concerns in the industry. The following are some of the examples of this work.

The AFSRB meets with the Alberta Funeral Services Association (AFSA) at two annual joint meetings, one in the spring and one in the fall, to discuss concerns, trends, and current activities. The AFSRB also provides a report to the members of AFSA at their annual conference in April.

The Executive Director attends regulator meetings to discuss current trends and issues that other jurisdictions are experiencing. One of these meetings is held in conjunction with the Funeral Services Association of Canada annual conference held in June each year. Regulators from across Canada attend this meeting, either in person or by conference call. Another meeting is with the International Conference of Funeral Service Examining Boards (ICSFEB), which includes regulators from the US and Canada. This conference includes guest speakers to educate and inform the attendees, opportunities to liaise with other jurisdictions by region, and group activities to work on projects moved forward by the ICFSEB. This organization will also send out email blasts to obtain answers to inquiries submitted by members on industry related topics.

## **Looking ahead**

The AFSRB is moving forward with a number of projects in the coming year that will increase efficiencies and modernize processes. Some of the most significant of these projects are the following:

**Governance training** – The AFSRB as a whole has not undertaken any governance training for a few years, so all Board members and the Executive Director will engage the services of a consultant to provide this training.

**Website** – development of a new website that will include additional consumer education material and resources, as well as including the ability for funeral services business to renew licenses online.

**Electronic licensing system** – a more efficient and encompassing program that will track business and individual licenses, monitor complaint processes, capture inspection information, and all phone calls to the Board, which in turn will allow for additional reports and easy access to all data at any time.

**Policy Manual** – The AFSRB has committed to working on new policies as recommended in the Operational Review, as well as converting the current policies to a new format which will include an evaluation of those policies for accuracy and relevance.

**Bylaws** – A complete review of the bylaws to be completed for accuracy and relevance.