



Annual Report for year ending
March 31, 2020



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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 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.

2019 – 2020 Board Members

Barbara McKinley – Chair (Public member)
Scott Barbour – Vice Chair (Industry member)
Debbie Miller – Treasurer (Public member)
Shawn Feist – Industry member
Dean Ross – Industry member
Wendy Lickacz - Public member

Board Staff

Executive Director	Karen Carruthers
Board Inspector	Del August
Administrative Assistant	Lori Elanik
Program support Assistant	Kelsey Westergaard

Auditors Hahn Lukey Houle LLP

2019-2020 Highlights

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

Business Plan

The new format for the business plan was put into use, with more specific goals and performance measures outlined. The AFSRB set several goals to ensure that important work was completed. The performance measures that were created will be addressed in the Report on Operations. The AFSRB completed several policy areas that have been outstanding for some time, such as the Board evaluation policy, finance policy and communication policy. As well, operational policies for Risk based Inspections and Compensation Fund were created. A new template for our policies was approved which has been implemented for the new policies.

Governance training

All AFSRB members received governance training this year. The board considers this to be ongoing training to be continued each year.

Computer licensing system

The AFSRB approved a proposal from Olatech Corporation to build a system to handle the licensing function for the funeral industry. This system will also be used for online complaint submission and tracking, online inspection tracking by our inspector, funeral professional continuing education tracking (done by the individual), and many other functions.

For the most recent licensing renewals, which were due on March 31, the licensing system was live and all funeral services businesses completed their renewals online. At renewal time, the payment processor was not working, but the office continued to manually process these payments. There is still more work to do with the new system and more development to take place, but this continues to move forward.

Website

A new website for the AFSRB went live in October 2019 developed by Olatech Corp. This was somewhat earlier than anticipated due to the contract expiration from our previous web host. There continues to be information and links added to the website, while we update information and develop additional functionality for the site.

Message from the Chair

2020 has been an exciting and busy year for the AFSRB and our staff.

With the attentive work of our Executive Director Karen Carruthers, the AFSRB has been able to implement an on line licencing platform to streamline and minimize the robust number of hours our office staff had to put into dealing with paper work, reducing the 'red tape' so to speak ensuring that documents are in order and properly taken care of.

In addition the board has implemented a new website that can be more effective in providing information to the consumers in our province ensuring that bereaved families and others can rely on up to date information about the services our board and funeral homes provide.

We have been working hard on policy items to make sure that the board is being diligent in managing our affairs.

All of this has been made possible by the diligence and hard work of board members Shawn Feist, Dean Ross, Debbie Miller and our recently appointed public member Jack Redekop, as well as our incredibly knowledgeable Executive Director Karen Carruthers and her staff Lori Elanik and Del August.

In the months to come, we will continue our work facilitating excellence in funeral services, promoting high standards within the industry and promoting a fair and informed marketplace. These are the cornerstones of our mission at the AFSRB.



Scott Barbour
Chair

AFSRB Overview

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.

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.

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 4 years have remained quite consistent with only minimal variations. This speaks to the stability of the funeral services industry and the funeral professionals who staff it. The licence type with the greatest increase was the dual funeral director/embalmer. A number of students became licensed this year without an equal number leaving the profession.

In the fiscal year 2019-2020, there were no licences refused.



Pre-need monitoring

Pre-need monitoring continues to be a very important function of the AFSRB. The majority of the pre-need files are in order with only minor issues indicated on the Accountant's reports. Many of the deficiencies relate to year end information that is captured on the business' register but has not yet been captured through the trustee report. There are currently two investigations into trust related issues with two separate funeral services businesses. These investigations were not concluded at year end and we do not currently have the resolution to these issues.

Inspections

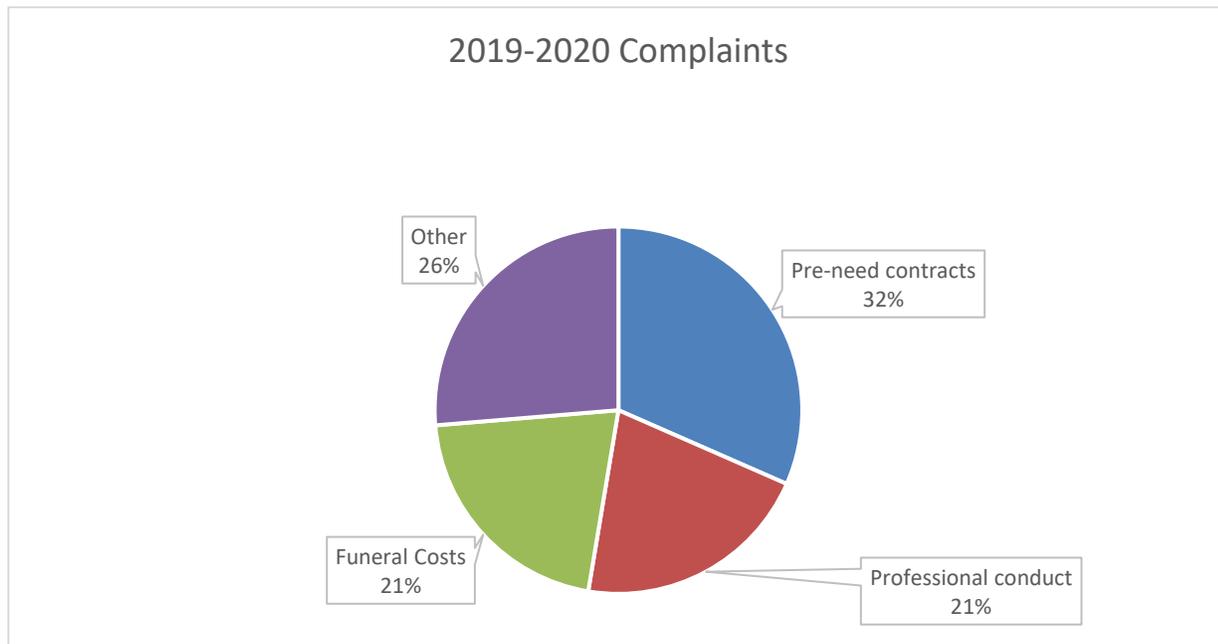
After implementing the new Risk-based Inspection process, the number of inspections is down from previous years. There were 58 funeral services businesses and 27 crematories inspected between April 1, 2019 and March 31, 2020. During these inspections, some of the deficiencies found were missing information in the business' pre-need register, not including the AFSRB logo and link on their business website, and some cremated remains over 5 years found on site.

Complaints

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

The AFSRB received 19 complaints between April 1, 2019 and March 31, 2020. This number is down 27% over last year, where there were 26 complaints. The average timeframe to conclude a complaint was 33 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 and clarity of charges. The second highest complaint was regarding professional conduct which includes advertising issues and transfer of the deceased. Also with the second highest number was funeral costs, which is not regulated under the *Funeral Services Act*.



Protecting Consumer Rights

Website

The Board's website, 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. A new website was launched in October 2019. This was earlier than anticipated due to the expiry of the previous hosting contract. The new website allows for the information to be easily viewed on smart phones and other electronic devices. There continues to be updates and new material added to the website.

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. Members of the public can request free copies of the brochure from the AFSRB office. A PDF version is also available online.

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 2019-2020, there was only one information session provided to a care facility in the Edmonton area.

The AFSRB is looking at ways to expand the reach of public education through a variety of methods and has included this as a goal in the current business plan.

Responding to inquiries

The Board office fielded more than 1,100 phone calls and 20,000 emails, which compared to last year is approximately 300 calls less and 6,000 emails more. These contacts 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. 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. 2019-2020 was the start of a new three-year cycle where all funeral professionals begin to obtain 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. The new subject matter for the mandatory course will be determined in 2020.

The AFSRB requires that each licensee justify the value of the continuing education 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:

1. Business Practice (setting priorities, time and team management, administrative duties, business responsibilities);
2. Communication (including understanding the psychology of grief, mediation, conflicts resolution, and general communication);
3. Professionalism (appearance and demeanor, legal and ethical demands, participation in professional organizations and activities and self-care); and
4. 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. For example:

- 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 joint spring 2020 meeting was cancelled due to COVID 19. The AFSRB also provided a report to the members of AFSA at their annual conference in April 2019.
- 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 the spring 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 (ICFSEB), 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 has developed a robust business plan to continue to move forward and modernize the work of the Board. There are a number of goals that have been set for the coming year, which may be more challenging to achieve due to COVID 19. Some of the most significant of these projects are:

Consumer Information – ensure all of our materials are up to date and reflect the current trends in the funeral industry.

Website – work will continue on the new website and will include additional consumer education material and resources, as well as including the ability for funeral service professionals to check their licence status and enter their continuing education requirements. We are also working on a Board member only portal for Board meeting information, key documents, policies, etc.

Electronic licensing system – continue to develop the on-line licensing system, including enhancements which will include inspection and investigation tracking, and other revisions to enhance the ease and clarity of use.

Policy Manual – The AFSRB has committed to continue the work 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.

Continuing Education – the AFSRB will be determining the topic for the next mandatory course as decided by the Board. This mandatory course is required to be completed prior to March 31, 2022, but the course will need to be available well before that date.

Digitizing records – the AFSRB is moving forward with a project to digitize all licensing, complaint, investigation and appeal/hearing files, in order to mitigate the risk of losing those documents to fire, etc.