

Claims By Online Cremation Providers In The Spotlight



New South Wales, Sydney, Jul 6, 2021 ([Issuewire.com](https://www.issuewire.com)) - A new wave of startups selling online cremation has raised the ire of consumer advocates and local funeral directors.

Online funeral startups like Tulip Cremation, Solace (US) and Farewell (UK) use technology to sell consumers the idea that they will save thousands of dollars, compared to using a local funeral director. However, critics have accused these startups of potentially misleading and exploiting unwary consumers through their aggressive marketing campaigns.

For example, one funeral startup in Australia, Bare Cremation, makes the claim that consumers will 'save up to 80% compared to traditional funeral homes'.

According to Martin Masson, Owner of Tribute Funeral Services, Victoria, these types of claims are false and misleading. "Startups comparing a 'direct cremation' to a 'traditional funeral' is like comparing apples with oranges!", he says.

How do they compare to local funeral directors?

So how do online [funeral startups](#) compare on price, quality and value for money? We decided to do our own research and our findings may surprise you.

Depending on your postcode, a bare-bones cremation sold online can cost anywhere between \$1,299 to \$2,999. Costs may be more if you choose to pay in instalments. These prices do not include an additional Prepaid Establishment fee charged for prepaid funerals. And if you want to add a Celebrant for a memorial service, then there will be an extra fee for that.

A survey conducted by [eziFunerals](#) lays bare the idea that consumers get a better deal with online cremation providers. According to a survey of independent funeral directors, there was no significant price difference or saving between an online direct cremation and a similar service provided by local funeral directors. In fact, some funeral directors are even cheaper.

The survey found that direct cremation costs by local funeral directors can start anywhere from \$1,190 to around \$3,000. Funeral directors also advised that they only charge around \$150 for the Prepaid Establishment fee. One funeral director (Personal Farewells, NSW) stated that they do not charge any establishment fee. This is significantly less than the fees charged by online cremation providers.

“Our cost for a direct cremation (\$1,190) is lower and we offer so much more for our families. We are family owned and whether it be a direct cremation or a full traditional service doesn’t diminish our care for the deceased. Families know the name of our staff transferring their loved one into our care,” says Troy Upfield, Owner of Wooling Hill Memorial Estate, Victoria.

“I don’t understand why they charge so much for a celebrant? Our celebrants charge us \$400 (some charge us \$450 but we wear the variance). And we don’t even charge our families a Prepaid Establishment fee,” says Stephanie Kelly, Owner of Personal Farewells, NSW.

“We provide a unique, dignified and elegant cremation service for unattended or direct cremations (\$2499). Every direct cremation we provide is taken to the crematorium in our hearse, with a casket spray,” says Jillian Vuksanovic, Owner of Mayfair Funerals, Western Australia.

The use of subcontractors is an area of concern

Most of the [funeral directors](#) we spoke to stated that they were also concerned that some online startups were using subcontractors to undertake the cremation, without the customer’s knowledge.

From our research, it appears that Western Australia (WA) may be the only state that restricts the use of subcontractors as part of a funeral director’s licence. The following is a summary of the WA Funeral Director Conditions of Licence, as they apply to subcontractors:

- Funeral Directors must disclose to the consumer any subcontracted services and detail what services are subcontracted and by whom, and what the fees and charges are charged by the subcontractor.
- Clients must sign and agree that they have been made aware of and consent to the subcontractor and subcontracted services.
- Funeral Directors must provide a service agreement, outlining services rendered between the Funeral Director and the subcontractor, to the client.
- Funeral Directors shall not use a subcontractor to deliver the deceased (conduct a funeral) to the cemetery.
- Funeral Directors must disclose to the client if they are paid or offer to pay a commission eg. spotter fee, or anything of value to a third party or subcontractor to secure human remains.

Clients must sign and agree that they have been made aware of these fee transactions.

Source: Funeral Director's Licence Conditions of Issue. Metropolitan Cemeteries Board (2021/2022)

So what's the main difference?

According to eziFunerals, the main difference between an online [cremation](#) provider and a local funeral director is not price, but the quality of service and value for money.

How they work: Online direct cremation providers simply receive your order (online or by phone) and assign your loved one to a sub-contractor to collect and cremate the body. You can't dress your loved one and can't visit to say one last goodbye. If that's all you want, then these funeral tech companies could be right for you.

"There is no physical location, no face to face contact and no funeral home."

Funeral directors surveyed stated that they are deeply invested in the community and have a professional duty to take care of your loved one. Most funeral directors said that they will wash and dress the body in preparation for a dignified cremation. Some funeral directors also indicated that they even allow immediate family members to visit their loved one prior to cremation, at no additional cost.

It pays to do your homework!

Nigel Davies, of Lonergan & Raven Funerals, a Past President of the National Funeral Directors Association of Australia, said he was also concerned with low cost prepaid direct cremations. "The funds left with these online investments could not possibly be honoured should these tech companies go under. Families may be left with perhaps enough to pay the cremation, certificates and transfers, but no coffin or service costs," he says.

"Families have a right to know where their loved one is to be taken after death, by whom and when and how they will be cremated."

[eziFunerals](#) Owner and Founder Peter Erceg said that "Funeral directors are not opposed to competition and believe people should be given a greater choice of providers.

"However, families have a right to know where their loved one is to be taken after death, by whom and when and how they will be cremated. At the moment, we believe that this is where some online funeral tech companies may fall short.

"You only get one chance to create the appropriate funeral and it's important that consumers can be confident of the business that they're dealing with and there is a level of transparency," he says.

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Source : Funeral News Australia

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