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December 1, 2020

State and Local Health Departments

On behalf of ICCFA Members,

In light of the release of the National Academies of Sciences, Engineering, and Medicine (NAS) Framework for the Equitable Allocation of COVID-19 Vaccine, and the drafting of respective State vaccine distribution plans, the International Cemetery, Cremation and Funeral Association (ICCFA) is urging you to utilize the NAS recommendations for vaccine distribution to high-risk health care workers, including those same workers in the deathcare industry. This also follows CISA guidance to states on essential critical workers during COVID-19 response that includes deathcare workers as essential healthcare and public health professionals.

As developing an equitable allocation plan for a COVID-19 vaccine is critical in light of what are expected to be limited resources upon initial approval, prioritization should be given to those at most risk for infection and serious outcomes; in roles considered to be essential for societal functioning; and most at-risk of transmitting coronavirus to others.

Deathcare workers, which include funeral directors, morticians, crematory, funeral home and cemetery workers are all on the front lines in responding to the pandemic. The deathcare profession is handling the COVID-19 deaths in the United States from transporting and refrigerating the deceased, to meeting with family members/loved ones as well as the handling and final disposition of COVID-19 victims, and preparing the deceased for visitations, cremation, funerals, and ultimately burying the deceased.

Within the NAS framework, the highest priority for allocation of the COVID-19 vaccine is targeted to high-risk health workers, first responders, those with underlying conditions, and older adults in overcrowded settings, such as nursing homes. Specifically, under the classification of high-risk workers in health care facilities, the framework lists "***morticians, funeral home workers and other death care professionals involved in the handling of bodies,***" to receive priority vaccination. In addition, in guidance to states regarding classifying essential critical workers during COVID-19 response, the Department of Homeland Security Cybersecurity and Infrastructure Security Agency (CISA) has defined deathcare workers as essential healthcare and public health professionals.

Every day, deathcare workers risk exposure to the novel coronavirus as they handle remains and interact with the public. Enabling frontline deathcare workers to have access to a COVID-19 vaccine will help safeguard these essential workers so they can continue to provide the timely and effective handling of COVID-19 victims and other deaths. Failure to protect them could further exacerbate the public health hazard. Please make sure to include all deathcare workers as high-risk workers and include them as priority for vaccine distribution.

Thank you for your consideration. If you have any questions, please contact us at (703) 391-8400.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "Nadira Baddeliyanage".

Nadira Baddeliyanage
Executive Director, ICCFA

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "Poul Lemasters".

Poul Lemasters,
General Counsel, ICCFA

Founded in 1887, the International Cemetery, Cremation and Funeral Association is the only international trade association representing all segments of the cemetery, cremation, funeral and memorialization profession. Its membership is composed of more than 9,100 rooftop locations and 18,000 professionals in the cemetery, funeral home and crematory industries, as well as supplier and related businesses worldwide.