

## Executive Summary

### Introduction:

Members of the death care sector represent an essential workforce. This study was designed and conducted by researchers from Columbia University in New York City to address the following question:

“To what degree is the funeral industry and allied professions prepared for a pandemic event?”

### How was this question addressed?

A national U.S. web-based survey of funeral homes, cemeteries, state and national funeral directors associations, mortuary science schools and programs was conducted.

### What was the key finding?

- Most death care sector personnel were highly motivated to report to duty, to assist other sectors (such as the healthcare sector). Students and retirees were highly motivated to assist the death care sector.
- Pandemic planning was sub-optimal and death care sector members might have difficulty meeting their surge capacity needs.

### What were the key results of the survey?

Data from 492 individuals from 46 states indicated that:

- 93% of respondents would be likely to accept a pandemic vaccine
- Most worksites had limited preparedness plans in place
- Few had made arrangements for business continuity
- Few had HR policies in place to address personnel shortfalls for non-illness absenteeism
- Few had written preparedness plans.
- Schools do not teach preparedness elements.
- 2/3 had not identified the means of acquiring additional: staff, supplies, space or refrigeration
- 39% felt “unprepared,” 54% felt “somewhat prepared,” only 7% felt “very prepared”
- Although only about half of the businesses had participated in pandemic planning exercises with local agencies, almost all thought that these same agencies would help them meet their surge capacity needs during a highly lethal pandemic event.
- Most respondents were not planning to make any alternations to their provision of services.
- Training:
  - 45% had received some pandemic training the previous year.

- Preferred method was in-service training, followed by web-based seminar and lecture
  - Respondents much preferred to have professional trade association providing training, followed by DOH
- Ability to respond was very high:
  - Over 84% said they would be able to report to duty
  - Many secondary obligations might make this difficult
- Willingness to respond was also very high:
  - 83% were willing to report to duty. This percentage is as high as the highest level reported by physicians and emergency medical services.
  - Provision of vaccine, family provided with vaccine would increase willingness
  - Fear for family safety decreases willingness
- 79% of respondents were both “able” and “willing”

Final Conclusion:

- This is a highly motivated and altruistic sector
- These essential workers will most likely make every effort to report to duty
- Plans should address how businesses can remain in operation with the necessary staff, supplies, space, and refrigeration to meet their surge capacity needs.
- It would be most helpful if national and state associations would assist their members in their planning activities and also in providing them with pandemic-related training.