Best Practices in Death Registration and Death Notification – Alberta Vital Statistics

Death Registration

* Funeral Directors are given specific legislative authority in Alberta’s Vital Statistics Act to collect death registration information, Medical Certificates of Death and issue burial permits.
* Alberta Funeral Homes must enter into an Agreement with Alberta Vital Statistics in order to gain access to VISTAS, Alberta’s vital event registration database (access permissions are limited to registering deaths).
* Funeral Directors collect the Medical Certificate of Death directly from the physician or medical examiner.
* Funeral Directors enter death registration data in accordance with information provided by an informant (i.e. family member), as well as information recorded on the Medical Certificate of Death, directly into VISTAS. They can register the death and will then have access to generate a burial permit if all mandatory information has been completed.
* This process allows for what is usually a very short timeline between death (or the point where a family involves a funeral home) and registration of that death, as a funeral director requires a burial permit for disinterment (burial/cremation, etc.) of the deceased.
* Once a death has been registered on VISTAS, funeral directors have a 5 day “change window” in which changes can be made to the information on the registration. This can only be done if documents have not yet been submitted to Vital Statistics. This 5 day change window is linked to the 5 day delay on NRS for sending death notifications, which is referenced below.
* Funeral Directors must deliver the paper Death Registration document and the Medical Certificate of Death documents to VS within 10 days.

Death Notification

* Alberta Vital Statistics sends death notification via the National Routing System with a 5 day delay from the date of registration in VISTAS(see above last bullet) to:
  + Service Canada
  + Canada Revenue Agency
  + Statistics Canada
  + British Columbia Vital Statistics (Alberta also receives death notifications from BC via NRS)
* Most other provincial VSOs and many other government departments have access to a web portal where death data derived from VISTAS are uploaded specific to the stakeholder needs, usually on a regular schedule (i.e. weekly, monthly).
* Legislative authority exists to provide this information to most stakeholders that require it.

Gaps in Notification

-NRS would be the preferred method to exchange death notifications with all other provincial/territorial VS jurisdictions; however barriers include resources and budget.

-there are some stakeholders that we would like to be able to provide information to, but are restricted currently by our legislation.