

# Families of COVID-19 victims to get funeral assistance

BY MARY JORDAN AND KEVIN SULLIVAN  
The Washington Post

The Biden administration next week will launch a funeral assistance program that will give up to \$9,000 to cover the burial costs of each American who died of COVID-19 — the largest program of its type ever offered by the federal government. The program is open to families, regardless of their income, as long as they show documentation and have not already gotten similar benefits through another program.

The Federal Emergency Management Agency has reimbursed for burial costs before, but it has never offered as large a payment to so many people. In 2017, for example, FEMA paid \$2.6 million to 976 people for funeral costs of victims of three hurricanes — an average of \$2,664 per applicant.

But the novel coronavirus's immense toll means a burial assistance program of an unprecedented scale is now being assembled. More than 557,000 Americans have died of COVID-19. FEMA is setting up a dedicated toll-free hotline — 1-844-684-6333 — and a call center to answer questions about the program and take applications starting Monday.

Funeral aid was held up during the worst of the crisis last year until then-President Donald Trump signed a nearly \$1 trillion COVID stimulus bill



Ken Hammond, a funeral associate in Hagerstown, Maryland, holds flowers for the family of a man in his 50s who died of COVID-19 in January.

in the final weeks of his administration. The details were never made clear, but maximum benefit discussed at the time was \$7,000 and the funeral assistance program was to be capped at \$2 billion.

After President Joe Biden took office and signed the \$1.9 trillion American Rescue Plan last month, the program was expanded. The funeral aid — even if it doubles from the \$2 billion in the

measure signed by Trump — is still a tiny fraction of the \$1.9 trillion coronavirus relief bill, which was opposed by all but a few congressional Republicans.

“It’s a well-intended program that will benefit many,” said Bryant Hightower, a Georgia funeral director who is a spokesman for the National Funeral Directors Association.

But Hightower also said he thought it

would be a difficult program to administer. For instance, when an applicant submits a funeral bill that is stamped “paid,” he wasn’t sure how FEMA officials would know whether burial insurance had been used to pay for it.

David Harrington, a Kenyon College economist who has studied the funeral industry, said the program would likely end up giving more money to wealthier families than poorer ones, at least for funerals from January 2020 until now. Those with more money probably chose a pricier casket and more expensive headstone and have receipts showing they spent \$9,000 or more, and so can get the maximum benefit. But the receipts from a low-income family who opted for a no-frills burial will yield a smaller government check.

Harrington said that may change after people become aware of this benefit.

In the early weeks of the pandemic, many victims, especially those in nursing homes, were suspected of dying of COVID-19, but testing was limited. In many cases, overwhelmed doctors and nurses were more concerned with caring for the living rather than testing the dead. Many death certificates, therefore, did not mention COVID-19.

Now, to be reimbursed, many families may need to seek out doctors or coroners to amend death certificates.

## Pilot Butte

Continued from A1

“If someone thinks we missed a step, that’s the kind of comment that we’d expect to hear now,” Havel said.

Public comments will be accepted until 5 p.m. May 7, and can be made online, via email at OPRD. publiccomment@oregon.gov, or in writing at: Oregon Parks and Recreation Department, attn.: Helena Kesch, 725 Summer St. NE, Suite C, Salem OR, 97301.

The master plan will guide the park’s priorities for the next 20 years, Matt Rippee, district manager with Oregon Parks and Recreation, said in a press release Tuesday.

“It sets priorities for the next two decades, such as adding or improving trails, parking, facilities and signs,” Rippee said.

Since the process to update the master plan began in 2018, public feedback has been submitted, and it was similar to the results of a 2016 survey of day-use visitors. The survey found visitors consider hiking, sightseeing and outdoor photography as the most popular activities on the 141-acre park, which has 7 miles of trails. The survey also found the majority of visitors are local, living within 30 miles of the park.

A draft of the new master plan calls for several improvements to access points and trails. It proposes a new trailhead entrance at Lafayette Avenue on the west side of the butte and an access point at Derek Drive east of the butte. From the Lafayette entrance, the base trail would connect to Juniper Elementary School.

Another new trailhead at Greenwood Avenue and Summit Road would connect to nearby Pilot Butte Middle School.

The plan would maintain the two-lane road, but add marked parking spots at the summit. A vista trail would be added at the summit for hikers.

Previous public feedback led to several recommendations in the draft plan, such as providing more wayfinding signs, enforcing dog leash rules and considering an off-leash area and making the park more accessible for seniors.

In addition, the plan addresses the need for landscape restoration and the reconstruction of the exercise area and trailhead that were destroyed during the 2018 Fourth of July fire. The fire burned about 10 acres around the base of the butte.

All of the proposed improvements would be completed within 5 to 10 years, according to the state parks department.

Reporter: 541-617-7820, kspurr@bendbulletin.com

## Risk

Continued from A1

An Oregon Health & Science University forecast released last week estimated the current spike will lead to an average of 1,000 cases per day by next month.

### County risk tiers change

Evidence of the virus rebound was also found in the latest infection risk level ratings for Oregon’s 36 counties, issued later Tuesday.

After a steady trend of counties moving lower in the four-tiered risk ratings, the report this week showed a number of counties with infections on the rise, requiring a return to tighter controls on activities, gatherings and dining.

Family gatherings, workplace outbreaks and travel are the main reasons for Deschutes County slipping from moderate-risk to high-risk categories.

And while it’s too soon to know if spring break visitors may have affected the rise in cases, health officials are urging everyone to continue to wear a mask, maintain a 6-foot distance and to frequently wash their hands.

In addition, with the announcement that anyone 16 and older can get a vaccine starting April 19, Deschutes County Health Services is encouraging people to preregister at [www.centraloregoncovidvaccine.com](http://www.centraloregoncovidvaccine.com). When a vaccine is available, the county will send an email with a unique link that allows the recipient to sign up for an appointment, said Morgan Emerson, Deschutes County Health Services spokeswoman.

While COVID-19 deaths have continued to stay lower than previous peaks, health officials have remained concerned about possibly more virulent variants of COVID-19 spreading across the country and into Oregon.

Health officials are worried about highly contagious and potentially more lethal variants of the original virus that

### New risk levels for Oregon counties that will go into effect April 9-22:

Under the new rules, three counties qualify as extreme risk but will be at high risk restriction levels: Josephine, Klamath and Tillamook.

Five counties — Baker, Columbia, Lane, Polk and Yamhill — are in the two-week caution window allowed when a county drops into a lower level, only to rebound in the next period back to a higher rate. They are allowed two weeks to reverse the trend before higher restrictions are applied.

#### LOWER (15)

- Baker
- Crook
- Gilliam
- Grant
- Harney
- Hood River
- Jefferson
- Lake
- Lane
- Malheur (moved from moderate)
- Morrow
- Sherman
- Wallowa

- Wasco
- Wheeler

#### MODERATE (7)

- Clatsop
- Columbia
- Polk
- Umatilla (moved from high)
- Union
- Washington
- Yamhill (moved from lower)

#### HIGH (11)

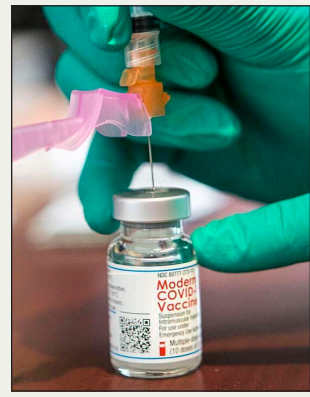
- Benton
- Clackamas (moved from

moderate)

- Coos: (moved from extreme)
- Curry: (moved from extreme)
- Deschutes: (moved from moderate)
- Douglas
- Jackson
- Marion
- Lincoln (moved from moderate)
- Linn (moved from moderate)
- Multnomah (moved from moderate)

#### EXTREME (3)

- Josephine (moved from high)



Ryan Brennecke/Bulletin file

Kerry Gillette, a physician assistant with Mosaic Medical, fills syringes with the Moderna vaccine Feb. 19.

- Klamath (moved from moderate)
- Tillamook (moved from moderate)

has killed 2.86 million people around the globe, including 556,000 in the United States.

Oregon has maintained some of the lowest infection rates and death totals in the nation, but has still reported just under 2,400 deaths.

“Impending doom,” is how Dr. Rochelle Walensky, director of the U.S. Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, last week described the combination of spreading viruses and relaxed safety habits by a pandemic-weary public.

The CDC has singled out one variant originally found in the United Kingdom — B.1.1.7 — as the main version of the virus hitting about two-thirds of the country. The Oregon Health Authority has reported 19 cases of the U.K. variant in Oregon, but believes there are many more.

### Shifting eligibility

Biden’s announcement on Tuesday is the second time a White House directive has changed Oregon’s phased vaccine eligibility timeline.

Brown and the OHA had originally set July 1 as the earliest date that a long series of priority groups would be finished and the vaccine could be offered to anyone who wanted a shot.

On March 11, Biden issued a directive that states drop all barriers to eligibility no later than May 1 as a way to speed up vaccination rates. Oregon condensed the timeline for its eligibility groups to meet the deadline. Brown said it might even be possible for some counties to open eligibility as early as April 26.

The new April 19 deadline will only impact Oregon and a few other states. A majority of states already allow all residents over 16 to be vaccinated and only two — Oregon and Hawaii — had announced plans to lift the final barriers on May 1.

The Biden administration has pushed for ramping up vaccinations, saying at least a third of adults in the nation have received at least one dose of vaccine and 3 million shots are going into arms every day.

Brown and Oregon Health Authority Director Pat Allen have said the greatest impediment to widespread inoculation is supply of vaccine.

Over the past week, Oregon has questioned the federal allocation process state officials believe could be short-changing the state on vaccine allocations.

“My office will work closely with the White House to en-

sure Oregon receives our fair share of federal vaccine supplies, so we can continue with a fast, fair, and equitable vaccine distribution process,” Brown said.

The White House announced Tuesday that 150 million shots have been administered since Biden took office on Jan. 20. He had promised to get 100 million shots into Americans’ arms by his 100th day in office, April 30.

Oregon health officials said it had injected over 2 million doses of vaccine into the arms of Oregonians. Most of the shots are for the two-dose Pfizer and Moderna vaccines.

The one-shot Johnson & Johnson vaccine has accounted for just over 50,000 shots in Oregon. It remains in limited supply nationwide due to a botched processing system at a subcontractor in Baltimore that ruined 15 million batches

that had to be destroyed. Doses currently offered are the correct mixture.

Several weeks of falling infection numbers had led the state to relaxing limits on eating at restaurants, holding public events and the number of customers allowed in businesses at one time.

The rise in numbers will lead to the return of some restrictions. Brown announced Tuesday that the most extreme limits would only go into effect if more than 300 people with COVID-19 are hospitalized and the number increases 15% or more over a 7-day period.

As of Tuesday, Oregon hospitals reported 205 patients with COVID-19.

■ [gvartner@eomediagroup.com](mailto:gvartner@eomediagroup.com)  
■ Bulletin reporter Suzanne Roig contributed to this report.

## Police

Continued from A1

McConkey said the technology has been consistently popular in community surveys.

Axon was formerly known by the name Taser, the line of electroshock weapons developed by the company in the early 1990s.

The sheriff’s office reviewed one other vendor: WatchGuard by Motorola. The trial period revealed several problems with the Motorola product, wrote sheriff’s Capt. Paul Garrison in a memo to the Deschutes County Commission. He said the difference in customer service between the two was “as stark as black and white.”

Garrison wrote Motorola offered a “closed” equipment system, whereby all repairs and upgrades must be done through Motorola. Safe Fleet-Coban, in contrast, was said to offer an open system that allows sheriff’s office staff to troubleshoot local problems.

■ Reporter: 541-383-0325, gandrews@bendbulletin.com

## DEATH NOTICES

**Gary Arnold Town**  
of La Pine, OR  
Nov 19, 1948 - March 31, 2021

**Arrangements:**  
Baird Memorial Chapel of La Pine is honored to serve the Town family. Please visit our website, [www.bairdfh.com](http://www.bairdfh.com), to share condolences and sign the online guestbook.

### OBITUARY DEADLINE

Call to ask about our deadlines  
541-385-5809  
Monday - Friday, 10am - 3pm  
No death notices or obituaries are published Mondays.

Email:  
[obits@bendbulletin.com](mailto:obits@bendbulletin.com)

### OBITUARY

## Cal Elshoff

1928 - 2021

After graduating from high school in Ohio and serving two years in the Navy, Cal came to Oregon where he earned two degrees from Oregon State, and met and married Alice Morgan, a marriage that persisted lovingly for 62 years. Together they moved to Bend in 1961 where Cal began teaching sophomore and advanced placement biology at Bend High. He thoroughly enjoyed his teaching and many of his former students remain friends today.

When not in the classroom he enjoyed running Oregon’s rivers in his McKenzie River drift boat, catching steelhead on the lower Deschutes on flies he tied himself, or hunting chukars with one of the dogs he trained himself. He is predeceased by a son, Don, and daughter, Megan, and survived by his wife, loving daughter, Dana Howell, and a passel of grand and great grandchildren.

A celebration of his life will be held at a later date.

Contributions can be made to a conservation group of choice or to Partners In Care.

## A Smarter Way to Power Your Home.

**REQUEST A FREE QUOTE!**

**ACT NOW TO RECEIVE A \$300 SPECIAL OFFER!\***

**1 (844) 989-2328**

\*Offer value when purchased at retail. Solar panels sold separately.

## LeafFilter GUTTER PROTECTION

BACKED BY A YEAR-ROUND CLOG-FREE GUARANTEE

CALL US TODAY FOR A FREE ESTIMATE **1-855-536-8838**

**15% OFF** YOUR ENTIRE PURCHASE  
Mon-Thurs: 8am-11pm, Fri-Sat: 8am-5pm, Sun: 2pm-8pm EST

**10% OFF** SENIOR & MILITARY DISCOUNTS

**5% OFF** TO THE FIRST 50 CALLERS!

| Promo Number: 285

\*For those who qualify. One coupon per household. No obligation estimate valid for 1 year. \*\* Offer valid at estimate only. CSL# 1035795, GCP# 10782608-5001, License# 7656, License# 30145, License# 41354, License# 99338, License# 128344, License# 218294, License# 603, 233, 177, License# 2152212986, License# 2196213296, License# 2705152152A, License# LE47FW622Z, License# W0056912, License# WC-2998H17, Nassau H/C License# H01067000, Registration# 176447, Registration# HC, 0649905, Registration# C127229, Registration# C127230, Registration# 366920918, Registration# PC6475, Registration# 0731804, Registration# 13W40995900, Registration# PA069383, Suffolk H/C License# S2229-H, License# 2705169445, License# 262000022, License# 262000403, License# 0086990, Registration# H-19114