



**British Seniors
Insurance Agency®**

British Seniors Funeral Report 2021

A guide to costs and planning

making
sure we're
prepared



British Seniors Funeral Report 2021

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Foreword

Losing a loved one is always difficult, but the past 18 months have been particularly hard for anyone who has suffered a loss in the UK.

The Covid-19 pandemic has resulted in many people suffering unexpected grief – and to make matters worse, in some cases they have been unable to give their loved ones the send-off they deserve. The pandemic has added a significant burden on families trying to organise funerals at an already tough time.

The financial responsibility of organising a funeral can also be stressful and frustrating. In our 2021 Funeral Costs Report, we reveal a rising trend in costs over the past five years. We found that people think high costs can add to the stress of bereavement; and nearly four in ten (38%) struggled to cope with the extra financial strain of a funeral.

At British Seniors, we pride ourselves on providing the information you need to make the right choices for you and those closest to you – whether you are planning for your own funeral or taking on the financial responsibility for a loved one.

As well as reviewing costs and options for funerals, we also share the personal touches that can make a funeral a unique and positive experience – and we hope you find this report useful and insightful.

.....

David Rees
Executive Director

D. Rees

How we created this report

We've based our report on two surveys. In one, 'Funeral Planning', we surveyed 1,549 UK adults who have helped to plan a funeral from 2016–21. We ran the survey from 7–21 July 2021. We used the results in Section 1 and 2 of our report, unless stated.

Separately, we surveyed 2,000 UK adults from a nationally representative demographic (that is, respondents had not necessarily planned a funeral in the past five years). We ran this survey from 7–14 July 2021. We used the results in Sections 3 and 4 of our report, unless stated.

Both surveys were conducted by OnePoll on behalf of British Seniors.



Overview in figures

£5,631

was the **weighted average cost of a funeral in 2016–21**. But depending on the choices you make, the cost can easily reach £7,500 or more – with prices on an upward trend over time.

38%

struggled to cope with the extra financial strain of a funeral – but if the funeral is a burial, this rose to 46%.



1 in 3

turned to some form of **borrowing** to fund a funeral – which is not surprising, considering the numbers who struggled to cope.



£1,963

was the **average contribution toward the cost of a funeral** from loved ones, the last time they suffered a bereavement. This burden can fall on the young, with 69% of people aged 18–24 having to contribute.



32%

of those surveyed **have nothing set aside** for their own funeral, either as savings or insurance.



Section 1

The financial cost when a loved one dies

When we lose a loved one, grieving can be a painful experience. At the same time, it brings responsibility. You may find yourself organising a funeral as well as your loved one's financial affairs.

In this section, we look at how much people end up paying after a bereavement – and how it's changing from year to year.¹

¹Source for Section 1 unless stated: our 'Funeral Planning' research, which surveys people who have organised a funeral from 2016–21.



The cost of a funeral can add up

When we organise a funeral, we want to celebrate the lives of the people we're remembering – and to help our guests do the same. But the cost of a funeral can add up to more than we think.

In our survey, we asked people to tell us what they spent the last time they had to pay for a funeral – taking into account 19 different cost elements, from the flowers to the catering to the reception venue. This looked back to funerals held at any time from 2016–21.

After weighting each cost according to how many chose it, we found that the average cost of a funeral is more than £5,600.²

But it's easy to spend more. When you add up a list of costs that people may choose, the price of a funeral could easily rise to more than £7,500 – even with restraint.³



² £5,631 figure is calculated by asking respondents to give figures for a list of 19 different cost elements – then weighting the results depending on how many chose each element.

³ £7,571 figure is calculated by adding the average cost paid for each of the funeral director, flowers/tributes, officiant, catering, limousines/vehicles, venue, invitations/orders of service, death notices/sundries, burial fees, burial plot, headstone/plaque, and doctor's fees. In practice, not everyone may choose every element.

The funeral is just part of the expense



When a loved one passes away, the funeral can be a major expense. However, it's by no means the only cost that family and friends might have to cover.

When we consider other potential expenses, it's easy to see how costs can quickly rise.

When we consider the 'basic' average costs of a funeral – a funeral director, officiant, doctor's fees, and either a burial or cremation – the average costs of these elements add up to £4,068 for a burial and £3,635 for a cremation.⁴

On top of these expenses, organisers usually also need to pay for the funeral reception venue and catering – plus extra costs such as a memorial, death notice, order sheets and flowers. When we asked funeral organisers how much they spent overall on reception and associated costs, the average was £2,451.

Meanwhile, our survey shows the average cost of professional fees – that is, the cost of administering the estate – was £2,499.

⁴This calculation takes the average costs of four elements – funeral director, officiant, doctor's fees, and either burial or cremation – then adds these averages. In practice, not everyone may choose every element.

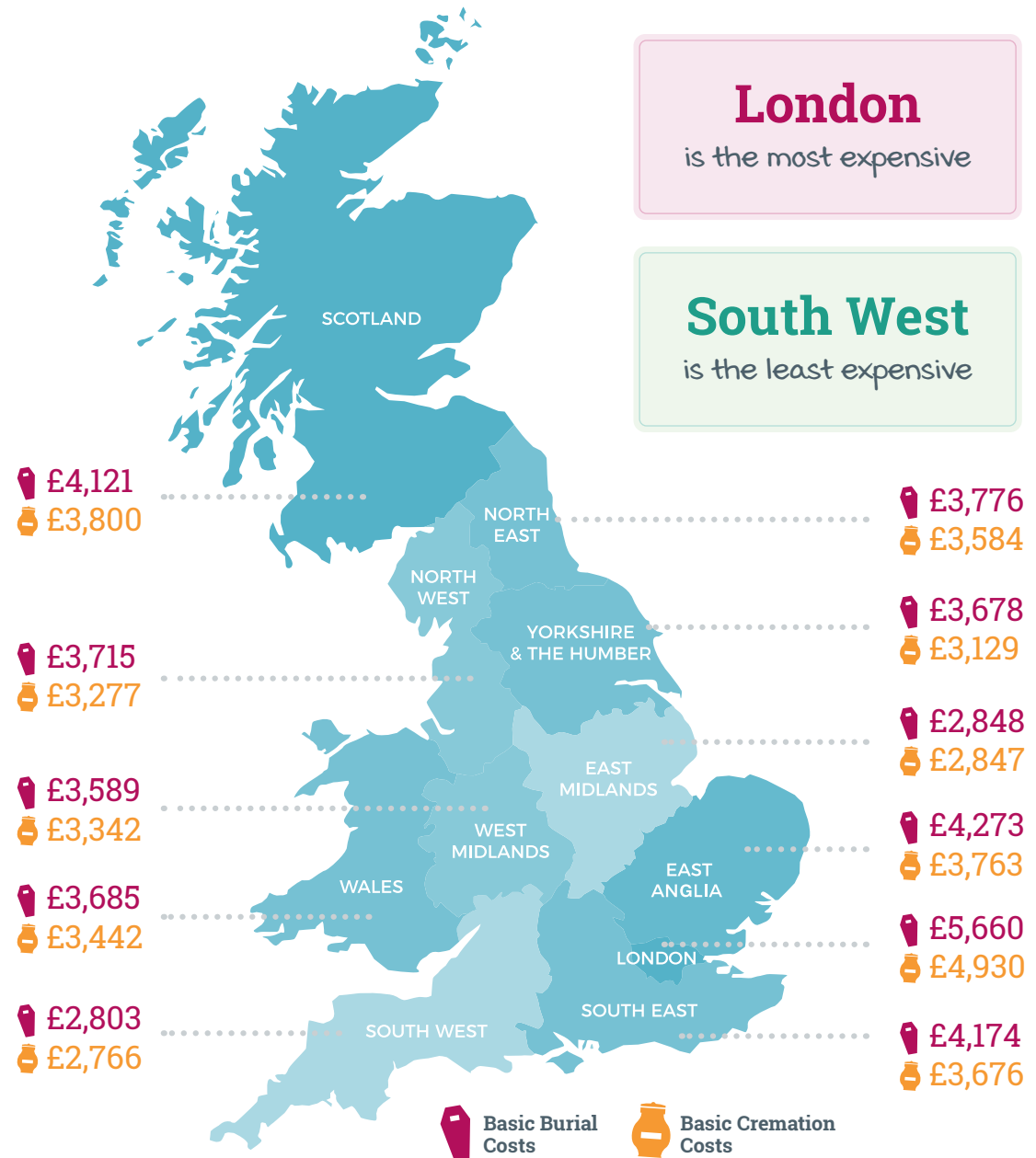
Where you live can affect the price

Not everyone pays the same for a funeral. Our survey reveals that costs can vary depending on where you live.

Unsurprisingly, we found that costs in London were the highest. Respondents in London said they paid £5,660⁵ for a 'basic' burial, and £4,930 for an equivalent cremation. By contrast, the cheapest regions are the East Midlands and the South West, where average costs of a basic burial or cremation are both less than £3,000.

London, too, sees the highest difference between the cost of a basic burial and the cost of a basic cremation, at £730. This may reflect the high cost of a burial plot in a congested city where space is at a premium.

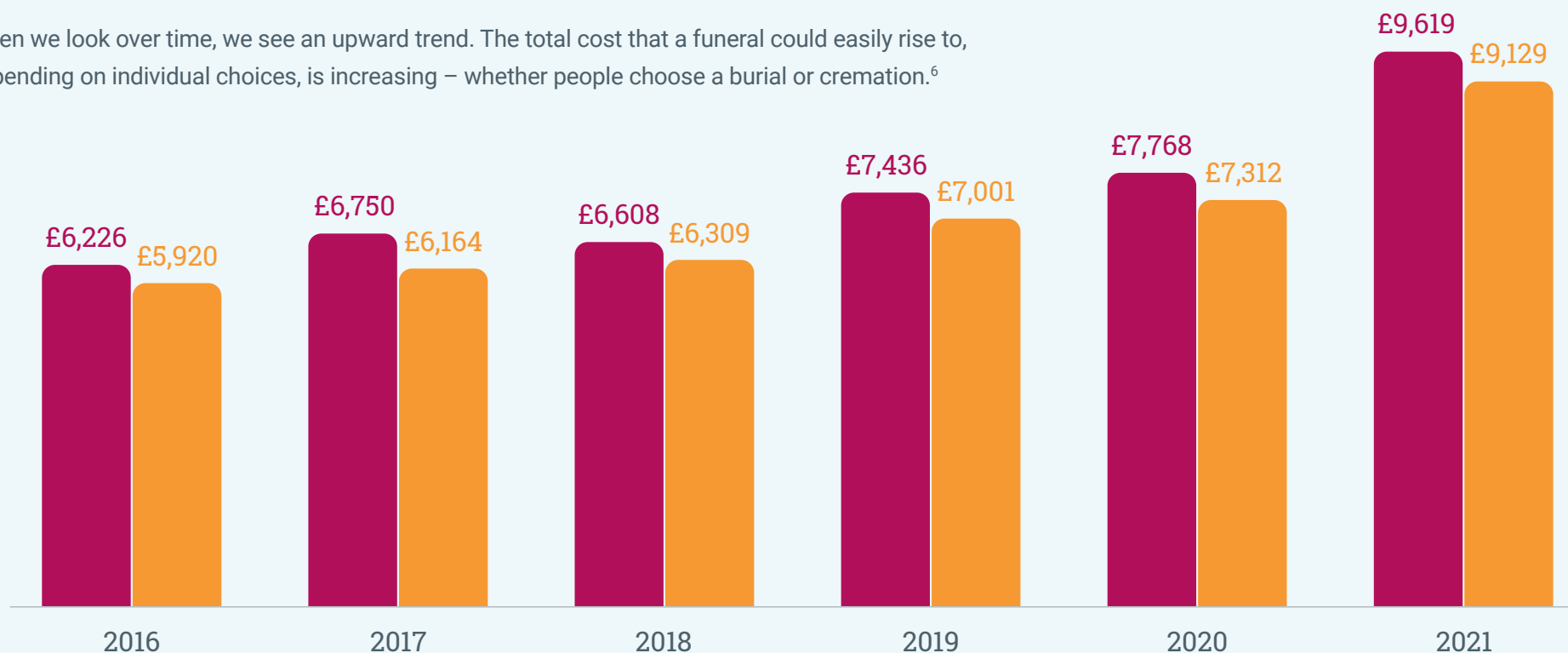
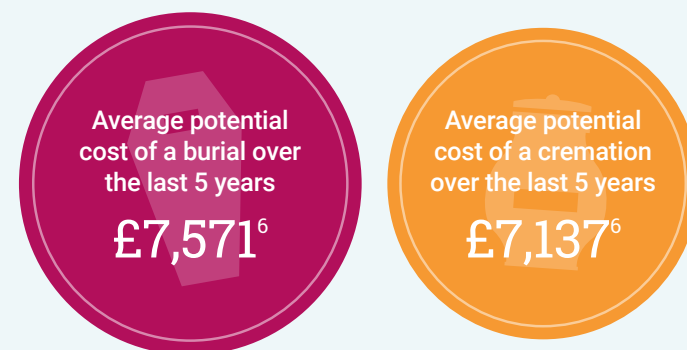
⁵Figures on this page are calculated in the same way as in footnote 4, then broken down by region.



Rising trends

When you are paying for a funeral, it can be useful to understand how costs compare over a period of time – so our survey asked people about funerals they had organised at any time between 2016 and 2021.

When we look over time, we see an upward trend. The total cost that a funeral could easily rise to, depending on individual choices, is increasing – whether people choose a burial or cremation.⁶



⁶Figure is calculated by adding the average cost paid for each of the funeral director, flowers/tributes, officiant, catering, limousines/vehicles, venue, invitations/orders of service, death notices/sundries, headstone/plaque, and doctor's fees – plus burial or cremation as appropriate. In practice, not everyone may choose every element..



Section 2

Making difficult choices

There can be unexpected choices to make when planning a funeral. Naturally, we want to respect the wishes of the person we're remembering – yet the decisions we make can also affect the price we pay, as our survey reveals.⁷

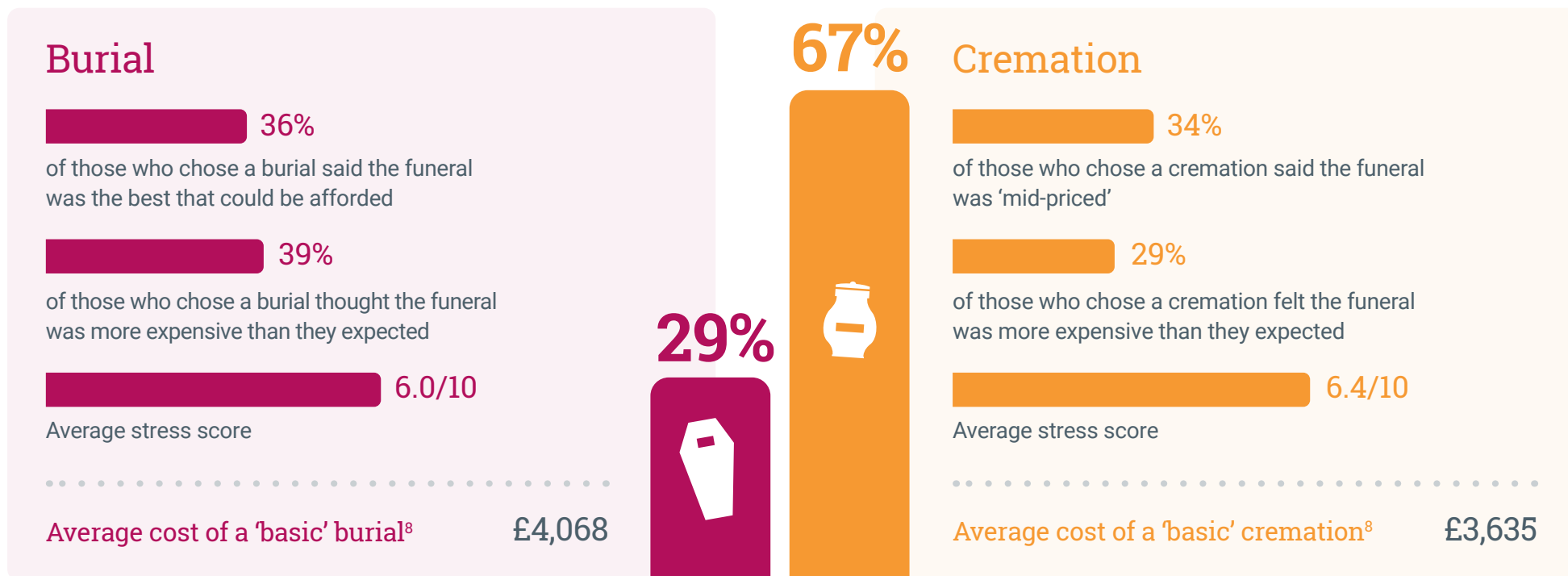
⁷Source for Section 2 unless stated: our 'Funeral Planning' research, which surveys people who have organised a funeral from 2016–21.



Burial or cremation?

When we are organising a funeral, one of the most pressing decisions we have to make is whether to have a burial or a cremation.

Our decision will depend on many factors – such as the religious tradition of the deceased, whether they wanted an environmentally friendly ‘natural’ burial, and so on. Yet however we choose, burial is often the higher-cost option – and can turn out to be more expensive than expected.



⁸This calculation takes the average costs of four elements – funeral director, officiant, doctor’s fees, and either burial or cremation – then adds these averages. In practice, not everyone may choose every element. Figures cannot be compared directly with the cost of a direct funeral on the next page.

Direct cremation offers a low-stress option

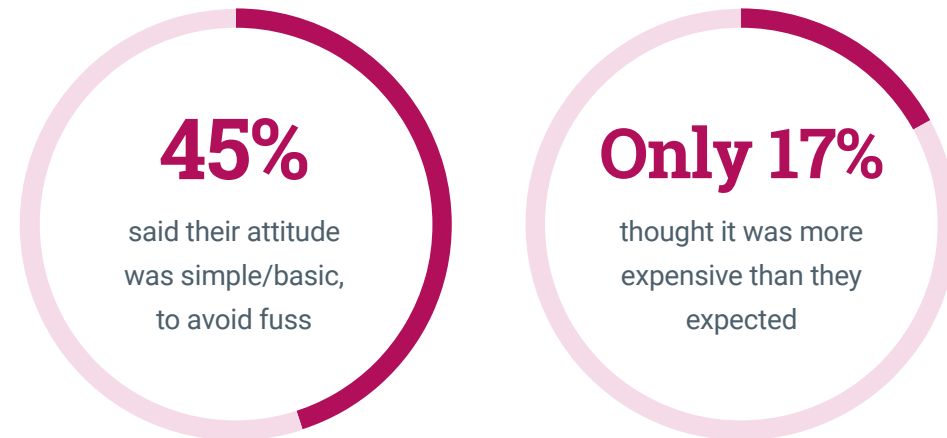
Sometimes, we want a basic, low-stress way to remember our loved ones. In this situation, another option is a direct cremation. With a direct cremation, there is no ceremony or service; instead, the deceased is taken directly to the crematorium.

The direct cremation is not a popular option in the UK: only 4% chose it. But it does mean that costs can be kept down. When we asked people what they paid overall for a direct cremation, the average was £2,127.

We found that direct cremation is much less stressful than other options. This type of funeral had an average "stress score" of just 5.2/10.

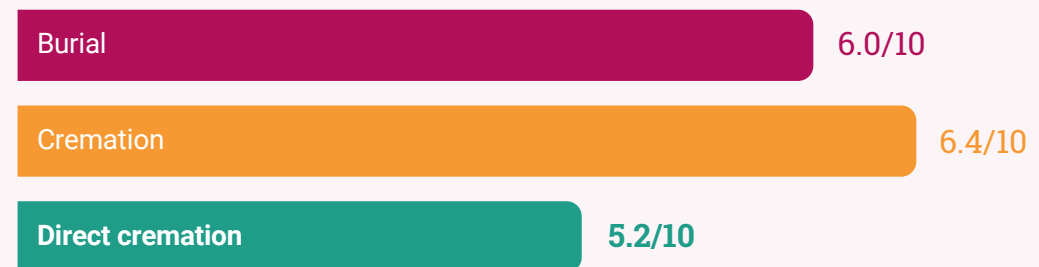
Attitudes to the cost of a funeral

Of the 58 respondents who chose a direct cremation:



Direct funeral helps reduce the stress

Average "stress score" of the three funeral options:



Burials or cremations: What's behind our choices?

The choices we make can be influenced by a range of different factors, including the wishes of the person we are remembering. But what we decide can also have a financial impact, affecting our ability to bear the costs.



"The deceased made the plan in advance"

Agreement with statement...



"I took ideas from funerals on TV or film"

Agreement with statement...



"I struggled to cope with the extra financial strain"

Agreement with statement...



The funeral director: someone to help guide choices



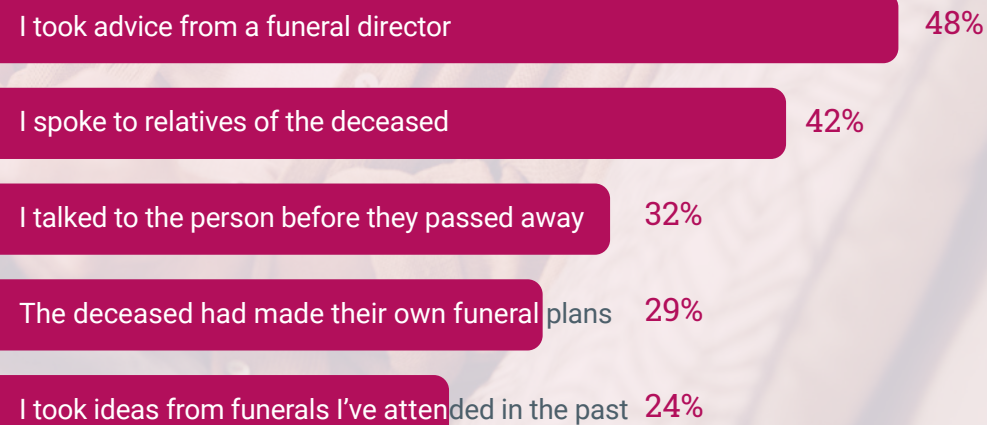
Planning a funeral can be difficult – and so can the decision-making that comes with it. So it can be useful to have someone who can help with making choices. A funeral director can do just that. Ninety-four per cent of us used one the last time we had to organise a funeral.

As our table shows, just under half (48%) of those surveyed said that advice from a funeral director contributed to their decision when planning a funeral.

Yet funeral directors can make up a substantial part of the overall cost: organisers paid, on average, £2,239 for the funeral director over the years of our survey. From 2020 to 2021, the cost rose 16% to £2,760.

Funeral director is a major influence on decision-making

Top 5 ways people made decisions on the funeral plan:



Covid-19 affects the choices we make

As we know, the Covid-19 pandemic has had a devastating impact on many families. Sadly, of those who helped plan a funeral from March 2020 onwards, 38% said their loved one had passed away from coronavirus.

Covid-19 restrictions made it difficult for families making funeral arrangements: many people were not given a chance to organise the funeral they believed their loved one deserved. This undoubtedly led to further pain and distress. Of those who planned funerals during the pandemic, most (63%) say Covid-19 had a major impact.

Meanwhile, a majority of all respondents (56%) believe restrictions made funerals more difficult to organise than usual.

Covid-19 influenced the financial choices people made when paying for a funeral. When a loved one passed away from coronavirus, people may have had to cover unexpected costs. Perhaps relatedly, more deaths from Covid-19 were unexpected, meaning people had less money set aside.

Reasons for covering some or all of the cost a funeral

"We wanted to give them a better send-off"

50% said this when a loved one passed away from Covid-19

18% when they did not

"They didn't have anything set aside"

58% said this after someone died from Covid-19

18% when they did not

"The death was unexpected and no plan had been made"

58% of deaths due to Covid-19

29% which were not

22%

of us say we have changed the way we think about and plan our funerals because of Covid-19⁹

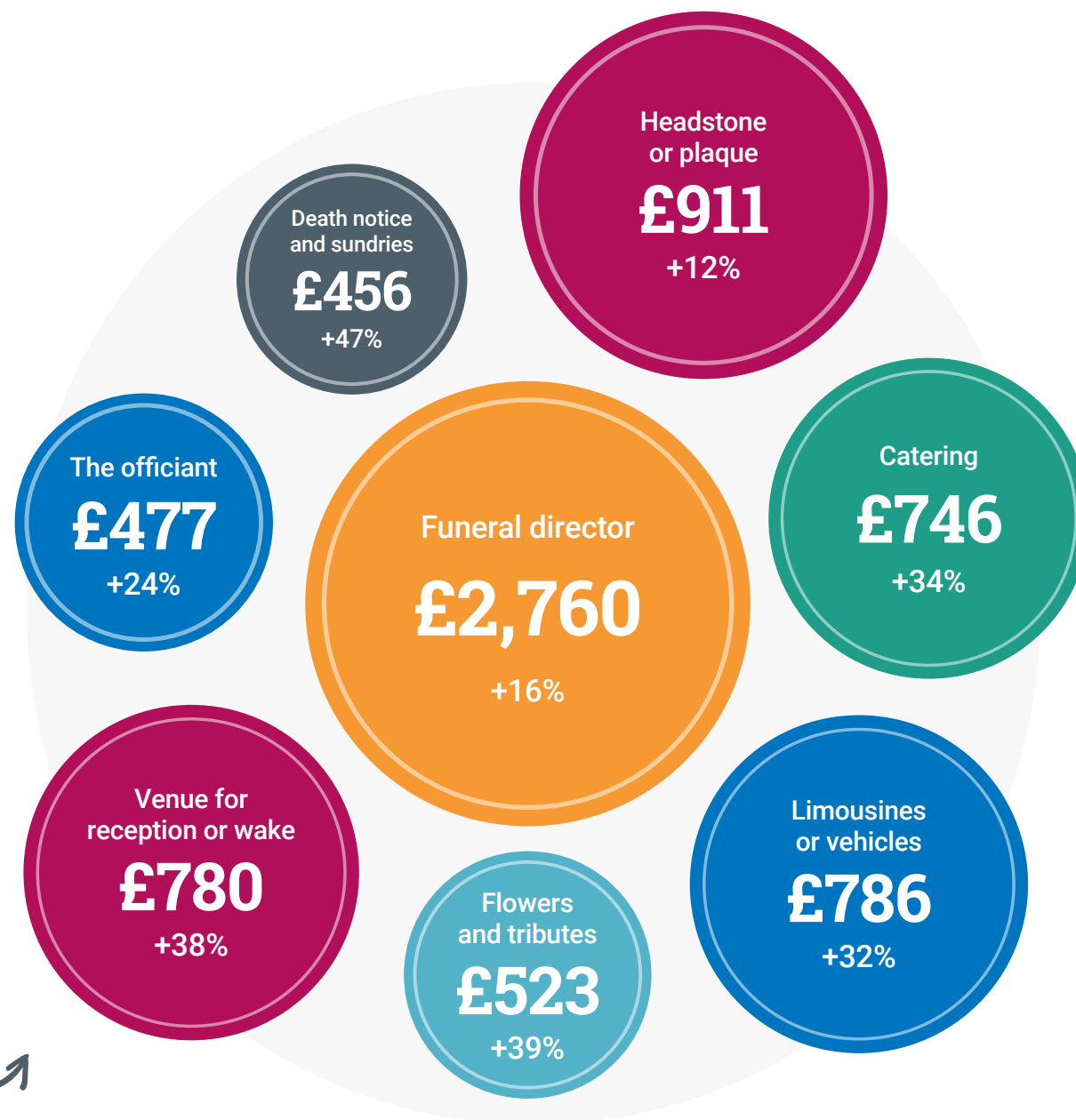
⁹This figure is from our nationally representative demographic, including people who did not organise a funeral.

In 2021, we spent more on the detail

Perhaps due to the impact of Covid-19 lockdowns ending, people who organised funerals tended to spend more in 2021 on the personal details related to guests – such as notices, orders of service, flowers, venues and catering.

Other expenses, such as the officiant and funeral director, also increased in cost, but not to proportionally the same extent.

What we spent on each item in 2021, and the rise since 2020 ↗



Section 3

Paying for funerals: the double burden

Losing a loved one is difficult for everyone involved. But sadly, financial pressures can add to the stress, making it a double burden on the bereaved. Here's what our data shows.¹⁰

¹⁰Source for Section 3 unless stated: our survey of our nationally representative demographic, who had not necessarily organised a funeral.



Costs can be unexpected

The loss of a friend or family member can happen when it's least expected. But even though 45% of us have paid for a funeral out of our own pockets, it's something many of us don't plan for.

In our survey, as many as 30% of people who had paid for a funeral say they didn't expect to have to do so – showing that bereavement costs may be hard to predict.

On average, the last time loved ones had to help with costs, they contributed nearly £2,000 towards funeral costs – with some (14%) paying more than £3,500.

¹¹Figures refer to the last time a respondent experienced a family bereavement

Funerals: the cost to family members¹¹

£1,963

Average contribution toward funeral costs

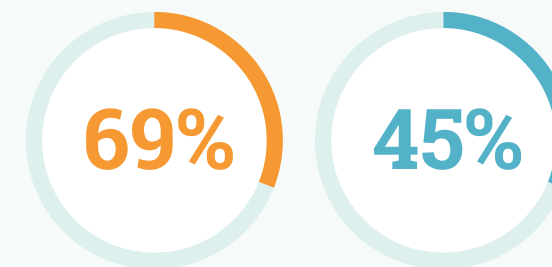
£3,500+

Paid by 14% of those who contributed

What loved ones pay for most often...

1. Coffin or casket
2. Flowers or tribute
3. Funeral director
4. Cremation
5. Hearse

The burden can fall on the young



of people aged 18-24 have had to help out with funeral costs

of people aged 65+ have done the same

A funeral can be hard to afford

Not everyone can cover the cost of a loved one's funeral. Our survey shows that less than half (43%) say they could "definitely" afford the associated costs if they suffered a bereavement now. Meanwhile, nearly one in six (16%) say they couldn't afford it.

To pay for a funeral, six in ten (60%) had to rely on their savings. But one-third of people had to resort to borrowing. While some turned to people they knew or put the cost on a credit card, 7% took out a payday loan.

How respondents paid after their most recent family bereavement



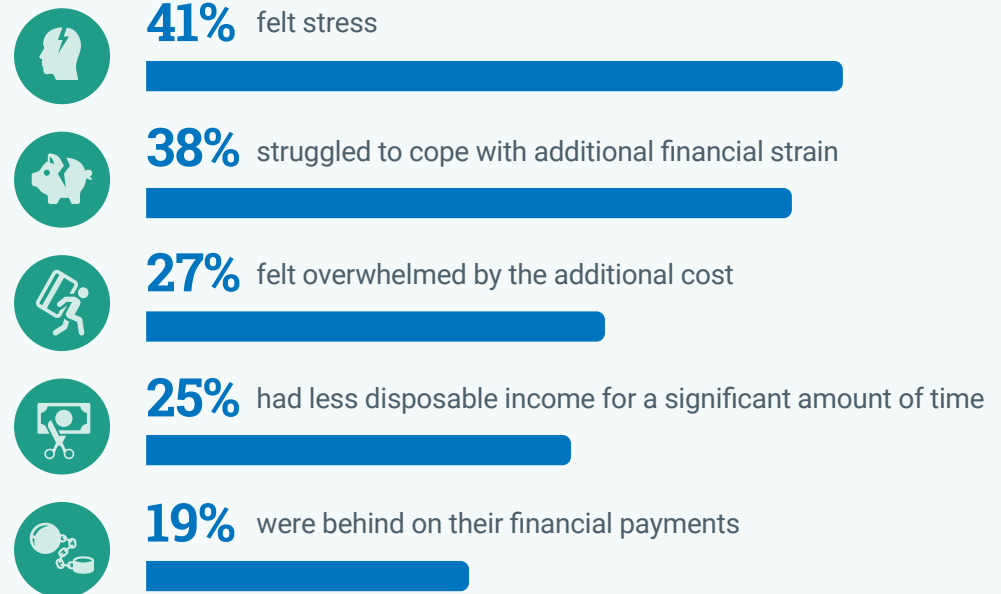
The bereaved can suffer extra strain

When financial stress is added to grief, the impact can be hard to bear. Nearly four in ten (38%) said they struggled to cope with the additional financial strain, with significant numbers also reporting feeling “overwhelmed” or falling behind on payments.

With burials being more expensive than cremations, the impact was greater when people chose this type of funeral. Some 46% of those who planned a burial struggled to cope, but only 34% said the same when the funeral was a cremation.¹²

¹²All statistics on this page come from our ‘Funeral Planning’ research, which surveyed people who had organised a funeral in the past five years – except the final 52% statistic, which comes from our survey of a nationally representative demographic who had not necessarily organised a funeral.

Impact from having to pay for some or all of the costs of a funeral



more than half of people who have never had to help plan a funeral say they think it would be “difficult” to do

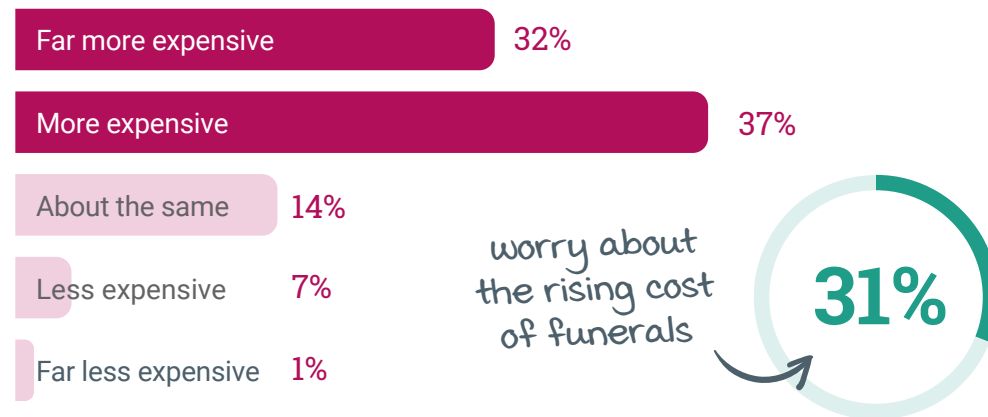
52%

High costs can make things worse

The perception that funerals can be expensive can make the financial pressure worse. Yet most people not only think funeral costs are rising (69%), but believe high costs add significant stress to the bereaved (84%).



Do you think funerals are more or less expensive than five years ago?



Do you agree that the high costs of funerals adds significant stress to bereaved families?



Section 4

Planning our own funeral

Our own funeral might not be something we like to think about – but making plans can reduce the burden on our family and friends when the time comes. However, people aren't always prepared, as our figures reveal.¹³

¹³Source for Section 4 unless stated: our survey of our nationally representative demographic, who had not necessarily organised a funeral.



Nearly a third have nothing set aside

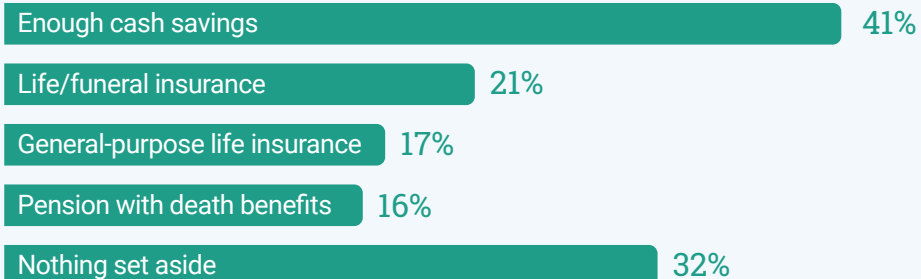
It can be hard to save money for our own funeral – perhaps because we aren't ready to think about it or we can't bear the cost. Overall, nearly a third of people (32%) haven't put money away, either as savings or insurance.

The most common reason for this, people say, is finding the money. Of those with nothing set aside, 37% say they can't afford to save or take out the insurance. Yet many also say they're too young to think about it, find it too hard, don't have any dependants, or just don't know how much they'll need.

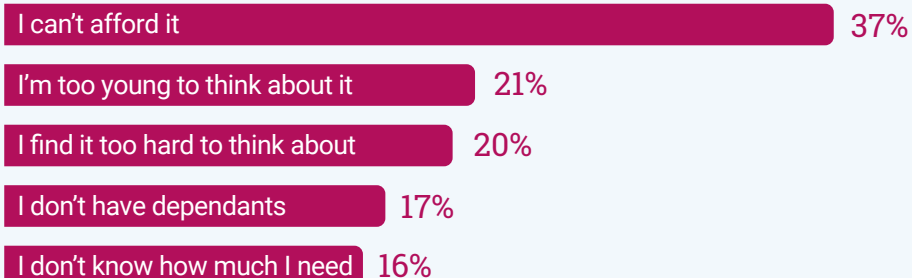
Those who do have something set aside have £3,480, on average, available for their funeral, though 29% have £3,000 or less.

¹⁴£2,151 figure subtracts the average cost of funeral when people have something set aside (£3,480) from the weighted average cost of a funeral in Section 1 (£5,631).

What people have set aside for a funeral



Why people have nothing set aside



£3,480

Average amount set aside – leaving a £2,151 shortfall against the weighted average cost of a funeral, even when people having something saved¹⁴

Having that difficult conversation

It can take courage to talk about funeral plans with the people we love. The good news is that many of us have taken this difficult step: 46% of us have discussed our plans with someone else – and 40% have discussed someone else's plans.¹⁵

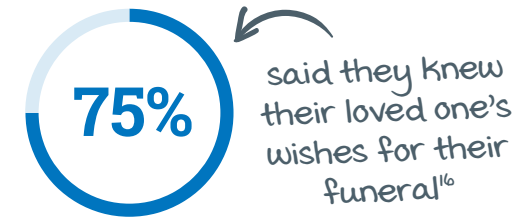
Roughly the same number (42%) also say we want to make sure that our family are taken care of when we pass away.

For some of us, one obstacle may be that we don't really know how to get started. As many as 20% wouldn't know how to plan a funeral, while even more never think about their own funeral (24%) or don't know how much it might typically cost (27%).

¹⁵Figures include those who say they did both, rather than singularly one or the other.



Personal touches: How we'd like to be remembered



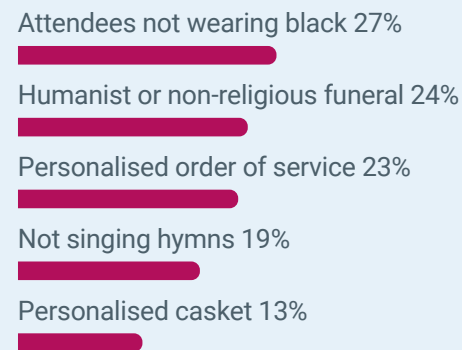
Funerals come in many different forms. In our survey, many of us, for example, imagine our funerals will be rich in sound, colour, scent and imagery. More than one-third would like our favourite song playing at the funeral (34%); others want colourful clothes, attractive flowers or poetry.

Our choices may be inspired by the unusual or non-traditional services we've attended. It's quite usual to have been to a funeral where mourners didn't wear black (27%), or to a non-religious ceremony (24%).

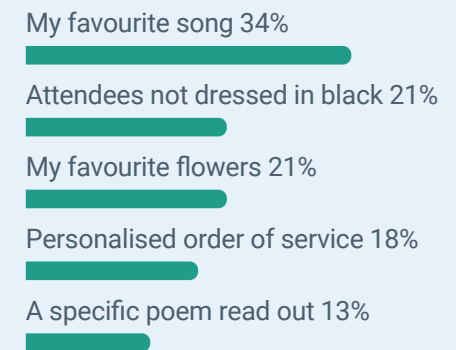
Yet some of us want to keep things simple. When it comes to choosing a funeral, 23% imagine a direct cremation; 20% would like a simple cremation with a few guests.

Perhaps, by visualising our own funeral and thinking about the funerals we've been to, it can help us become aware of what we want – and start having those vital conversations with the people we care for and love.

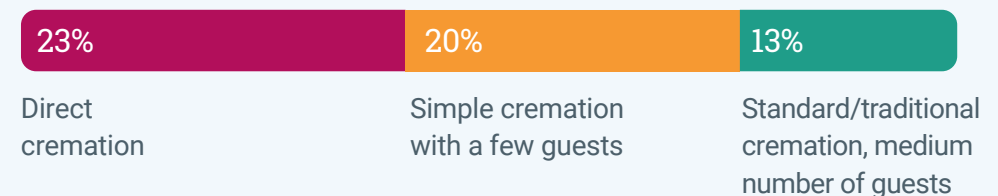
What people remember: Top 5 memorable details



What people imagine: Top 5 sentimental extras



Keeping things simple: The funerals we want



¹⁶This figure comes from our 'Funeral Planning' research, which surveyed people who had organised a funeral in the past five years.

Section 5

Real world case studies

We take a look into the real world experiences of two people who unexpectedly found themselves arranging a funeral following a bereavement over the past year.





Antoinette Givant

Antoinette Givant, a 68-year-old retired estate agent from Carmarthenshire had funeral insurance in place when her mum passed away in January aged 93.

Antoinette, who had been given a file of documents by her mum long before her passing, said: "I was quite lucky really, as my mum had handed over the file to me a year or two before she died – so I could just go to the file cabinet and get it out.

"I knew she'd had insurance, and I was glad she just handed it over to me so I could be in charge of it when the time came."

Antoinette was surprised at how much admin there was in the immediate aftermath of her mum's death, sorting out the flat she had been living in, including all the utilities, gas and the electricity bills. Fortunately, the life insurance her mum had taken out took a burden away from the grieving family.

Antoinette said: "When I got the call, I felt a combination of 'oh my goodness, I'll never see my mum again' with feelings almost of relief – and then I realised I was now an orphan. It was within two days I'd started thinking about the funeral – thinking I needed to get it organised."

"Once you've got a death certificate there's a lot to arrange. But with the insurance it was one less thing to be concerned about. I'd never arranged a funeral – I've got two sisters and a brother – and had all the insurance details, so it was sort of left to me, and I'm glad I had it."

Antoinette estimates funeral insurance saved her thousands, and wonders whether her immediate family would have been able to foot the bill.

She added: "I think for some of my siblings, it would have been a financial struggle to pay for it. For me, having just moved, I had some money in the bank, but my mum was very insistent that she'd got this in place, so I was really glad."



Kathy Preston

Kathy Preston, 72, a retired accountant from Birmingham, did not have life insurance when husband Alan became ill with cancer during the pandemic – because they were planning on uprooting their lives and emigrating to Australia.

However, after Alan started having back pain, he tried to get medical assistance but struggled due to Covid, and doctors being busy. After many scans, tragically it was determined he was terminal and there would be no chance of treatment – or any time to arrange life or funeral insurance.

As a result, Kathy was left thousands of pounds out of pocket, dealing with a significant loss in her life as well as her dream of seeing out the rest of her retirement in Australia ruined.

She recalled: “It was on the day Alan died it dawned on me that I had to deal with the funeral – I think all tend to be in denial about things like this. When they came to confirm his death, they asked if I had a funeral director in mind – I said no, and asked who they’d recommend – but I felt like I was still in shock. At that point, I had no idea how much this was going to cost or anything – I was in a daze, and didn’t know where to begin.”

The first financial hit came after just days, when the funeral director that had been recommended to Kathy asked for a £1600 deposit. This then made her think how much more she would have to spend on the funeral - and how she would cover it, adding stress to an already difficult period.

Kathy said: “In total, the funeral, with the wake and catering, cost about £7000. Having to pay the deposit so early is one of the things that really got me. Initially everything went on credit cards, and it’s taken almost an entire year to get everything sorted out financially.”

Kathy also wasn’t given much time to prepare her financial affairs – as a letter demanding payment from the funeral directors landed on her mat just five days after the service. “I hadn’t even got his ashes at that point, I felt that was rather insensitive to receive an itemised bill after such a short amount of time.”

Perhaps saddest of all was feeling as though she wasn’t able to give Alan a proper goodbye, and feeling forced to pick cheaper options for the funeral. Kathy said: “I felt I wasn’t able to give Alan the send-off he would have wanted. Having to go for the cheapest casket, I felt like I was letting Alan down. That would not have been my choice. In hindsight, I would advise anybody to get a funeral plan in place or take out life insurance. There we were, planning a new life in Australia – we just didn’t think about what the future would hold. I’m not going to emigrate now, I’m going to stay in the UK – and hopefully my daughter can come to visit me.”



**British Seniors
Insurance Agency®**

Get in touch



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Lines are open from 9am to 7pm Monday to Friday (excluding Bank Holidays).
Calls are recorded for training and quality purposes.



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