



Media Release

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Future proofing sustainable access to prescription opioids to relieve suffering

Palliative Care Australia (PCA) has today released a position statement, [Sustainable access to prescription opioids in palliative care](#), with endorsement from 12 other peak health organisations, to call for a “future-proof” approach to ensure sustainable access to prescription opioids for Australians receiving palliative care.

The statement warns that palliative care patients are being placed at risk of harm, as an unintended consequence of increased government and regulatory restrictions surrounding non-cancer opioid prescribing to reduce the misuse and abuse of opioids within the wider community.

PCA’s National Clinical Advisor and Palliative Care Nurse Practitioner Kate Reed, says ensuring palliative care professionals receive adequate support to manage the pain and breathlessness needs of their patients is crucial to provide quality and compassionate palliative care to all those who need it.

“All Australians receiving palliative care must be able to access necessary and appropriate evidence based opioids to manage and prevent suffering from uncontrolled pain and other symptoms,” said Ms Reed.

“Finding relief from severe pain can be a challenging and exhaustive experience for people living with life-limiting conditions and their caregivers. Opioids are an essential part of the pharmacological options needed to help relieve the pain and/or breathlessness that may be experienced by someone living with a life-limiting illness. It is therefore essential that authorised prescribers of opioid analgesics, including GPs, palliative care specialists and nurse practitioners, are given adequate support to treat their patients’ pain needs promptly and appropriately without unnecessary regulatory barriers,” said Ms Reed.

“With the right care, including appropriate medication, pain can be well managed in the vast majority of people at the end of life. Therefore, there is an urgent need to increase the understanding of appropriate use of opioids within the Australian palliative care context and provide leadership and guidance to authorities as they review regulatory processes,” said Ms Reed.

The statement, which has been endorsed by *Palliative Care Nurses Australia, Australian College of Nursing, Royal Australasian College of Physicians, Australian College of Nurse Practitioners, Australian College of Rural & Remote Medicine, Australian Healthcare & Hospital Association, The Australian Pain Society, Painaustralia, Paediatric Palliative Care Australian & New Zealand, The Pharmacy Guild of Australia, The Society of Hospital Pharmacists of Australia and The Australian & New Zealand Society of Palliative Medicine* makes eight key recommendations, including the reformation of the Palliative Care Medications Working Group to review the Palliative Care Schedule of the Pharmaceutical Benefit Scheme (PBS).

“The misuse and overprescribing of opioids is a serious public health issue that must be addressed. However, it must not be at the expense of people receiving palliative care who have a human right to access medicines including opioids,” said Ms Reed.

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