



# Media Release

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## New paper warns of COVID-19 impact on grief, bereavement and mental health

A new paper has warned of the negative impacts on wellbeing, physical health, mental health and financial security that result from insufficient support after the death of a loved one.

The outcomes paper *Palliative Care and COVID-19: Grief, Bereavement and Mental Health* to be launched today at the Parliamentary Friends of Palliative Care forum, also highlights the positive impact of grief and bereavement support provided by palliative care professionals on the wellbeing of people affected by loss.

PCA Chair Professor Meera Agar says the 20 recommendations in the paper, if followed, will help bring to life critical conversations, community awareness and policy changes around mental health, grief and bereavement even beyond the COVID-19 pandemic.

“The unprecedented impact of COVID-19 in Australia in 2020 has meant that grief and loss issues are often compounded by the inability for people to follow their traditions surrounding death and dying. It is essential to establish national frameworks and standards to help people deal with grief and bereavement in the long term,” Professor Agar said.

The paper highlights the likelihood of long-term impacts relating to grief, bereavement and mental health distress for residents, patients, family and staff in health and aged care as a consequence of the pandemic.

Some population groups have been particularly vulnerable to the effects of the pandemic on bereavement practices. Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities have experienced unique challenges because, in many cases, they have been unable to engage in traditional practices. Close interpersonal contact has been restricted, large gatherings have been banned, family and community members have not been able to return to their country communities, or state and territory borders have been closed.

Professor Agar said that as a nation, especially during the pandemic, we must consider all that can be done to support the Australian community to cope with the added grief, bereavement and mental health distress that is affecting people.

“We must also take the opportunity to learn from what has happened and prepare more strategically for future pandemics or other disasters which may have similar implications.”

The Outcomes Paper was the result of two PCA strategic forums held with palliative care, grief, bereavement and mental health experts in May and August 2020, and provides key recommendations for policy makers, health and aged care leaders and professionals, and consumers and carers.

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