The Decision Assist Project Update is a summary of key news and events from the Decision Assist program. Funded by the Australian Government, Decision Assist aims to build capacity, linkages and access to palliative care and advance care planning services for older Australians by providing support and education to GPs and aged care providers.

Welcome

We are pleased to bring you the first edition of the Decision Assist Project Update for 2015.

Although the year is still young, much has been happening behind the scenes with the ongoing development of Decision Assist.

As a result, important new activities are now being rolled out to suit the diverse advance care planning and palliative care needs of GPs and aged care professionals.

Read on to find out more and to get an update on existing Decision Assist projects…
For GPs interested in enhancing their skills in **palliative care**, a variety of educational opportunities will be available in 2015 to suit specific needs.

The popular palliative care **workshops** will continue nationally, with upcoming dates in Brisbane. Visit [www.decisionassist.org.au](http://www.decisionassist.org.au) for the full list and details about registration. These workshops are accredited with RACGP and ACRRM to contribute to QI&CPD and PRPD points.

In addition, an **online module** as an alternative to the workshop will be available from April. This will be accessible via gplearning for RACGP members or RRMEO for ACRRM members, and enable GPs to earn QI&CPD and PRPD points.

The **Clinical Audit** is also continuing in 2015, providing GPs with an opportunity to review their approach to managing the care of older Australians with advanced chronic conditions living in the community. Accredited by the RACGP and the ACRRM for the 2014-2016 triennium, it contributes to 40 QI&CPD and 30 PRPD points.
New practice nurse workshops

The needs of practice nurses supporting patient care in the community will be addressed in a new series of Decision Assist workshops that commence in March.

The first practice nurse palliative care workshop will be held in Melbourne as part of the APNA workshop on 27 March. To register, visit the continuing education section of the APNA website via www.apna.asn.au

Similar workshops will be held in Perth on 1 May, and Adelaide on 29 May.

Professor Elizabeth Reymond from ANZSPM, said practice nurses are integral to driving change in general practice, so it is important they are educated when promoting change for the general practice community.

From April, GPs can register for an Active Learning Module (RACGP members) or a Theory Practice Activity (ACRRM members). This educational activity is an opportunity for GPs to increase their capacity to manage the care of older Australians with advanced chronic conditions living in the community.

Also from April, GPs can participate in an online ‘case of the month’ discussion. The forum will be moderated by a palliative medicine physician, covering scenarios such as dementia, frailty syndrome, renal failure and cancer. For more information contact Dr Karen Cooper from ANZSPM by email at karencooper.ANZSPM@bigpond.com

Four podcasts about managing common symptoms in palliative care will also be available via the Decision Assist website in April. The four topics to be covered are dyspnoea, pain, delirium, nausea and vomiting. Visit the Decision Assist website for more detail.

And specialist operators, including specialist palliative care physicians, are on the Palliative Care Phone Advisory Service - 1300 668 908 - ready to take calls from GPs 24/7 on all palliative care issues, ranging from medication, symptom management, psychosocial support and bereavement advice to information about education.
Phone service review

Decision Assist has conducted the first data review on the palliative care telephone advisory service since it became operational last September.

It found the rate of calls steadily increasing each month and the purpose of calls changing over time, from general inquiries to more requests for palliative care clinical and service advice.

The data further revealed that 85 per cent of calls have been answered within the targeted 10 seconds, with an average answer time of between 9 and 11 seconds.

Most inquiries were for information on symptom management, followed by information on education, medication advice and how to find a service or resource. Among the States, Victoria recorded the highest number of calls, followed by NSW and Queensland but few calls were received from Tasmania and the NT.

Nurses were the main health professionals calling the line, followed by doctors, allied health professionals and personal care workers.

While call rates are increasing, Palliative Care Australia Chief Executive, Liz Callaghan, whose team manages the phone line, said it was interesting that very few calls came from the Northern Territory and Tasmania.

“These areas could potentially benefit most from a service like Decision Assist, as they generally do not have the same access to specialist services as providers in more populated areas,” Ms Callaghan said.

“I encourage health and aged care providers in regional and remote areas to give the service a try, as it offers a wealth of clinical support and education opportunities on palliative care and advance care planning.”

Meanwhile, calls to the advance care planning phone line have also been steady since it commenced operations in July 2014, with the number of calls growing each month and inquiries focusing on general advance care planning assistance, education and training and state or territory specific legislation in relation to advance care planning.
Online expansion

The depth of information on the Decision Assist website continues to grow. A new set of pages in the ‘Using Technology’ section details information and evidence relating to technology in health and aged care such as telehealth and e-Health.

Telehealth is the use of information and communications technology (ICT) to deliver healthcare at a distance, while e-Health includes a wider variety of applications such as booking and billing systems, electronic health records and the provision of health information online.

Visit the site to learn more about these applications:

- Associated websites
- Case studies and research
- Education for health care professionals
- End-of-life care and e-Health
- Financial support
- Practice guidelines
- Residential aged care and e-Health

Specific needs

Not all residents or recipients of home care packages are the same. Understanding the needs of and having access to support different groups is important. Three new pages have been added to the ‘Specific Needs’ pages in the Decision Assist website. These look at:

- Financially or socially disadvantaged
- Homeless people
- Veterans

These new pages complement existing information on Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people, people with dementia, Culturally and Linguistically Diverse communities, GLTBI people, and rural and remote populations.
Building better links

The homeless, Indigenous, culturally and linguistically diverse and LGBTI communities are among 20 projects across Australia sharing in more than $1.5 million in grants, announced recently as part of the Decision Assist Linkages project to build better links between the providers of palliative and aged care.

Linkages Project Leader, Professor Patsy Yates from the Queensland University of Technology, said the projects recognised that older people living in all types of circumstances need access to good quality palliative care.

Here are some examples of the projects now benefitting from the grants:

In Brisbane, many clients of a service called Footprints are either homeless or live in marginalised accommodation such as boarding houses, supported accommodation or public housing and their deteriorating health needs frequently go undetected until crisis point is reached. Many may also have complex mental health issues as well as physical conditions and historically neither aged care nor homeless services have been able to respond to end of life issues for this group. The Linkages grant to Footprints will establish firm links with other aged care and palliative care providers.

In New South Wales, the Whiddon Group will link with South West Sydney Local Health District on a major project that will service rural and remote, Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander and culturally and linguistically diverse communities across the state. A focus will also be the LGBTI communities in the Tweed Heads region. Centred in the Sydney suburb of Glenfield, the project will be rolled out to 26 aged and community care facilities from Bourke and Narrabri to Tweed Heads developing communication pathways and tools to enhance end of life care for clients.

In Victoria, organisations from suburban Melbourne to rural Bacchus Marsh, Melton and Moorabool will share in six grants totalling $480,000. The residential aged care facility Glanville Village in Echuca has identified a strong need for culturally appropriate palliative care for its Indigenous residents. Echuca Regional Health will link with the community palliative care service, the Aboriginal Health Liaison Officer and Glanville Village to focus on planning and optimise appropriate palliative care.
In **Tasmania**, Presbyterian Care Tasmania will link with Community Care North Primary to support staff caring for residents during their palliative and end of life stages. This project will create a culture of skills and confidence for staff when caring for residents including the completion of advanced care plans.

Northern **Adelaide** Medicare Local, Aboriginal Elders & Community Care Services and the SA Ambulance Service will link to ensure Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people living in aged care facilities have access to culturally appropriate services that allows equitable treatment. It is important that they are able to stay in the facility in comfort and privacy, able to spend time with family and friends and avoid unnecessary transition to hospital.

Based south-west of **Perth**, 360 Health + Community, Quambie Park Waroona, Bedingfeld Park and P&P Wallace P/L will link to strengthen partnerships between specialist palliative care providers and residential aged care staff, improving the delivery of palliative care and information.

Professor Yates said these projects are just some examples of the 20 successful grants that are being used to develop communication pathways, establish agreements, develop different care approaches or establish new or enhanced existing linkages between palliative care and aged care.
Aged care workshops

The Decision Assist aged care workshops are growing in popularity nationally, with details of workshop dates and locations now available on the ‘Aged Care Workshops’ page of the Decision Assist website.

A host of metropolitan and regional sessions are planned from March, for staff working in residential facilities in most States. Home care workshop dates are being finalised and online registrations are open from mid-March.

Here are some comments from recent workshop attendees:

“On behalf of Blue Care, Fraser Coast Cluster, I would like to thank you very much for coming to Bundy to hold our first Decision Assist Workshop. It was a very informative and interactive day for our staff, enhancing the skills, and developing a better understanding of Advance Care Planning and a Palliative Approach. These workshops will be pivotal in strengthening our implementation of the Blue Care Tailor Made Palliative Approach Program.” - Wendy, Fraser Coast, Blue Care – Cluster Office

“The Decision Assist Training-on line modules and Workshop are beneficial to all staff working in ACFs. The training complements the Palliative Care Approach in Aged Care and is a vital component as we seek to empower our residents to make decisions about their future care needs and to support their families.

The workshop presenters demonstrated excellent communication strategies and although I have previously been involved in Advance Care Planning I feel that I came away better equipped to understand and manage the processes of Advance Care Planning.”

- Pam, Aged Care Management
Social media

Decision Assist is now venturing into the social media space with encouraging results in the early stages.

It now has its very own Twitter account - @DecisionAssist - to keep people readily informed of ongoing news and developments with the program.

An aged care workshop Twitter and email campaign held just before Christmas was a big success, leading to many additional registrations and inquiries about the workshops nationally.

A number of prominent figures in politics, academia, health and aged care are now following @Decision Assist, and Project Update readers and their colleagues are encouraged to do the same.

Vox pops

See what experts in the field are saying about Decision Assist via some short video messages that have been posted on the Decision Assist website. The videos were filmed at last year’s national launch event and feature some interesting and enlightening insights from a range of leaders in palliative care, nursing, academia and aged care. They are available to view on the ‘What’s New’ page.

Reminder

Copies of the Decision Assist poster, brochure and postcard can be downloaded from the ‘News and Updates’ page on the Decision Assist website. Please feel free to distribute these at your workshops, seminars, meetings and events to help spread the word about Decision Assist. Phone stickers and fridge magnets are also available on request by emailing Rachel@palliativecare.org.au
Conferences and events

Associate Professor William Silvester, Chair of the Decision Assist Expert Project Group, presented a plenary session at the 24th Annual Tri-State Conference & Exhibition, in Albury on Tuesday 24 February.

The conference theme was ‘Aged Care: Adapt Today. Thrive Tomorrow’ and attracted aged care professionals from around Australia.

The topic of Associate Professor Silvester’s presentation was ‘Aged Care: Adapting advance care planning and palliative care education today, to help residents have a quality tomorrow’.

Meanwhile, Associate Professor Silvester will also speak at an event hosted by Medicare Local ACT on 4 March, called ‘Advance care planning: Find out what patients want’.

Project Update May 2015

The next edition of the Decision Assist Project Update will be issued in May 2015. Contributions and suggestions are most welcome. Please contact the program communications team, Rachel Hawes and Anna Manzoney, by emailing Rachel@palliativecare.org.au or Anna@palliativecare.org.au or by telephoning 02 6163 8404.