



Media Release

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Close the gap on palliative care

Palliative care for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people needs to be delivered with cultural awareness and respect, says Palliative Care Australia (PCA) CEO Liz Callaghan on Close the Gap Day.

Ms Callaghan said quality palliative care for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people occurred in some parts of the country where services have worked with the community's organisations to develop appropriate models of care, but there are many parts of Australia where this is not the case.

"The latest Close the Gap report shows improving health outcomes for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people, but there is still some way to go.

"This is reflected in palliative care. While the report does not examine palliative care, we know anecdotally that culturally appropriate care is not done well everywhere in Australia. Some parts of the county offer exceptional levels of care, but we need to see that good work spread.

"For many Aboriginal or Torres Strait Islander people returning to country to die is important, as is telling the story of their life," Ms Callaghan said.

Ms Callaghan said the Implementation Plan for the National Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Health Plan 2013-2023 was significant.

"This plan takes forward the vision for the National Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Health Plan 2013-2023 but the focus for palliative care is limited to older Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people, their families and carers.

"While some aspects of palliative care are recognised in the Health Plan, we would like to see measurable goals put in place to drive change where it is needed.

"Culturally inappropriate care at the end of life can cause unnecessary suffering and distress for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islanders, their families and communities.

"It is important that non-indigenous health care workers develop culturally safe practices through education, ongoing training and appropriate engagement with local Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities.

"Many Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people have one or multiple chronic illnesses, particularly as they age. These people should have access to culturally appropriate care at the end of life that will help them to manage the symptoms of their illness so they can continue to live their lives well," Ms Callaghan said.

Palliative Care Australia is a member of the Close the Gap Steering Committee.

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