



Media Release

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PCA calls for better Indigenous palliative care access

On National Close the Gap Day, Palliative Care Australia CEO Liz Callaghan says there is still a way to go in improving Indigenous health including better rural and remote access to palliative care.

Ms Callaghan said that according to *Closing the Gap – Prime Minister’s Report 2017*, the target to close the gap in Indigenous life expectancy by 2031 is not on track. On average, Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people still die 10-17 years younger than other Australians.

She said that encouraging outcomes over the longer term had been achieved with the total Indigenous mortality rate declining by 15 per cent between 1998 and 2015 and the largest decline was from circulatory disease (the leading cause of Indigenous deaths). However, the Indigenous mortality rate from cancer, the second leading cause of death, is rising and the gap is widening.

“While this report doesn’t address palliative care, it is important that all people with a life-limiting illness are able to access palliative care.

“We understand that while some parts of the country offer exceptional levels of palliative care, culturally appropriate care is still not done well everywhere in Australia. We need to see that good work spread,” Ms Callaghan said.

“Community-based local approaches to end-of-life care are preferred, which leads to a significant role for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander health professionals in the delivery of quality end-of-life care.

“It is also very important that non-Indigenous health professionals develop culturally safe practice through education or training and appropriate engagement with local Indigenous communities.

“Culturally safe palliative and end-of-life care means that providers or practitioners must understand how these communities want health care to be provided.

“Australia’s Indigenous people have strong connections to country, whether they live in urban or rural and remote areas. Understanding this and what this means would make final stages of life more comfortable for patients and their families,” Ms Callaghan said.

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

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