

Media Release

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Spiritual care is integral to palliative care in aged care

A joint position statement developed by Palliative Care Australia and Meaningful Ageing Australia call for the universal acceptance of the importance of spirituality and spiritual care for people receiving palliative and end-of-life care in aged care. The organisations also call for aged care funding models to include specialist spiritual care support.

Ilsa Hampton, CEO of Meaningful Ageing Australia says spirituality is broader than religion.

“Spirituality embraces the way we seek and express meaning and purpose; the way we experience our connection to the moment, ourselves, others, our world and the significant or sacred.

“Spirituality and spiritual care can become particularly significant for people as they reach the end of their lives and we have developed this position statement to highlight the importance of access to spiritual care and support for people in community and residential aged care,” said Ms Hampton

Liz Callaghan, CEO of Palliative Care Australia says the position paper notes that a primary goal of the palliative approach to care is to improve the person’s level of physical comfort and function and to address their psychological, spiritual and social needs.

“Palliative care in any setting is not just about meeting a person’s physical and medical needs. Palliative Care Australia and Meaningful Ageing Australia consider spiritual care to be an integral part of palliative care, yet it can be an element of care that is too often overlooked or neglected.

“In the position paper, we call for recognition and for resourcing of spiritual care and for aged care staff to be trained and supported to be aware of and meet the spiritual care needs of aged care clients and residents,” said Ms Callaghan.

Research quoted in the position paper highlights the importance of spiritual support in overall wellbeing and health outcomes, including increased hope, greater longevity and coping skills and less anxiety and depression. Specialised spiritual care visits and medical support with a focus on spiritual care are associated with higher quality of life scores near death, and can support people to prepare for their final months or weeks of life. The position paper also emphasises the role of spiritual care in supporting families and staff with their grief.

Both organisations noted that despite the evidence of the significance of spiritual care within palliative and end-of-life care there is no dedicated funding to support the provision of spiritual care or requirement for training in spiritual care in aged care.

“We consider this to be a big gap in aged care funding and resourcing. Spiritual care can benefit everyone approaching the end of life, not just those who identify as religious, and for that reason we believe it is an integral but overlooked part of palliative and aged care,” said Ms Hampton and Ms Callaghan.

Meaningful Ageing Australia is the national peak body for spiritual care and ageing. Palliative Care Australia is the national peak body for palliative care in Australia.

Media contacts: Palliative Care Australia Grace Keyworth – 0422 040 576 palliativecare.org.au

Meaningful Ageing Australia Ilsa Hampton - 0425 758 277 meaningfulageing.org.au @MeaningfulAge

