



Media Release

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Investment needed in palliative care workforce as demand increases

National statistics released today by the Australian Institute of Health and Welfare show that there were only 226 specialist palliative care doctors and 3,457 palliative care nurses in 2016.

The demand for palliative care has increased dramatically in the past 5 years, with a 28.2% increase in palliative care-related hospitalisations between 2011–12 and 2015–16, compared to a 14.6% increase in hospitalisations for all reasons over the same period. Whilst four out of five deaths are expected due to chronic illness, only one in two patients who died in hospital received palliative care.

Palliative Care Australia (PCA) CEO Liz Callaghan said these statistics show that more investment is needed to train and recruit palliative care health professionals, especially in regional and remote areas, to reduce the inequitable access to palliative care.

“Of the 226 specialist palliative care doctors; 190 work in major cities, 20 work in inner regional centres, 14 work in outer regional places and only 3 work in remote locations. The national average of 0.9 FTE per 100,000 population is well-short of the 2.0 FTE benchmark PCA is recommending in the [Palliative Care Service Development Guidelines](#).

“There’s a similar picture with palliative care nurses, with 2,482 nurses employed in major cities, 711 in inner regional, 247 in outer regional and only 18 working in remote or very remote locations. Particularly concerning also is the fact that only 101 palliative care nurses are employed in residential aged care facilities. This is not nearly enough to serve the population of over 200,000 residents, many living with complex needs that could benefit from palliative care support.

“The recently announced \$32.8 million investment into specialist palliative care support in residential aged care is welcomed and supports PCA’s call that palliative care should be core business in aged care, however this is contingent on matched funding from the states and territories.

Palliative Care Australia recently commissioned a national survey that showed almost all Australians believe it’s important for aged care services to be able to provide palliative care to their residents (95%, including 89% extremely/very important).

“Governments and health services must make it a priority to fund these positions, as well as ensuring the training pathways are there for doctors and nurses to be able to specialise in palliative care.

“As the Australian population ages and the number of deaths increase over the next decade, we need to ensure that the palliative care workforce also increases to keep up with demand, as well as increased end-of-life care training for all health professionals, undergraduate and VET sector students,” Ms Callaghan said.

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