



Media Release

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Royal Commission into aged care sector must examine palliative care provision

Palliative Care Australia (PCA) CEO Liz Callaghan says the Royal Commission into the aged care sector must examine the provision of palliative care to residents and consumers of aged care services.

“Palliative Care Australia and its members welcome the announcement of a Royal Commission into the aged care sector,” Ms Callaghan said.

“There are over 350,000 Australians cared for by aged care providers. Maximising their quality of life and ensuring a good death for these people is important. It’s concerning that the latest AIHW palliative care workforce figures show that only 101 palliative care nurses are employed in residential aged care services.”

“Currently, approximately 75 per cent of people aged at least 65 years who die in Australia used aged care services in the 12 months before their death, yet relatively few access palliative care in residential aged care. Commonwealth projects such as the [End of Life Directions in Aged Care](#) should help increase access through the creation of linkages with palliative care services. However better data is needed to understand how Australians receiving aged care services access palliative care support in the community, especially after-hours.

“We also would like to see a study into the quality of life until death in aged care services. To date, there has not been adequate information about the drivers for ensuring residents have a good death in aged care services or the ability for services to benchmark against best-practice palliative care provision.

“We know that in the next forty years, the number of Australians aged over 85 will nearly quadruple. The aged care workforce will need to grow to match this need, and they will need training in palliative care to ensure the people they are caring for are able to have the highest quality of life for as long as possible.

“Palliative Care Australia developed a set of [principles for palliative and end-of-life care](#) in partnership with aged care leaders in 2017. These principles should be used as a starting point for examining the provision and quality of palliative care in the aged care sector,” Ms Callaghan said.

Palliative Care Australia would like to see the addition of palliative care into the single aged care quality standards, released last week.

“PCA hope that the guidance documents to be developed for these new standards assist in supporting aged care services to ensure that the palliative care needs for people with dementia and other conditions are met,” Ms Callaghan said.

Palliative Care Australia would also like to see the community’s expectations of palliative care provision in aged care settings realised.

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“A nationally representative survey PCA conducted in 2017 found 80 per cent of Australians think that it is important for aged care services to provide palliative care to their clients.

“86 per cent of people surveyed also thought it is important that aged care services be clear about what palliative care they are able to provide.

“It is important that everyone is aware that palliative care can be provided to people receiving aged care services, and encourage community members to ask their aged care providers about what end-of-life care is available within their services.

“Also an integral element of holistic standards based palliative care is support for families, carers and in many instances, health professionals and support staff during the dying and bereavement processes,” Ms Callaghan said.