



Palliative Care
Australia
Matters of life and death

What is palliative care?



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Palliative care is high quality health care and support for people living with a life-limiting illness and their families. Palliative care helps people to live as well as they can by managing pain and symptoms to ensure their quality of life is maintained as the illness progresses.

Palliative care identifies and treats symptoms and issues associated with life-limiting illness which may be physical, emotional, spiritual or social. Palliative care is a family-centred model of care, meaning that family and carers can also receive practical and emotional support.

Palliative care is about maintaining quality of life. The aim of palliative care is neither to hasten nor postpone death. Rather, the focus is on living as well as possible, for as long as possible.



Who is palliative care for?

Palliative care is for anyone of any age (from babies to older people) who have been diagnosed with a life-limiting illness.

Paediatric palliative care is available for children and adolescents diagnosed with a life-limiting illness such as Duchenne Muscular Dystrophy, Edwards Syndrome, neuroblastoma and acquired brain injury.

Adult palliative care assists people with illnesses such as cancer, motor neurone disease, dementia, chronic heart failure, end-stage kidney or lung disease to manage symptoms and improve quality of life.

Palliative care extends to provide support and advice for family and carers.

When can palliative care help?

Palliative care can help a person manage their illness, particularly pain and symptoms, so they can live life as well as possible while dealing with the illness.

For some people, palliative care may be beneficial from the time of a diagnosis of a life-limiting illness. A person can receive palliative care for a long time before they die. Palliative care can be given alongside other treatments (for example chemotherapy, radiation, fluid removal procedures) or when other treatments have ended. Every person is different and every situation is different. Some people access palliative care on and off through various stages of an illness. Other people have an ongoing relationship with a palliative care team, seeing them at as required during the course of their illness.

Accessing palliative care early can help put plans in place to manage changes through the course of an illness and ensure there is time to talk about and understand a person's values, beliefs and goals for their care.

Palliative care is about much more than care provided when a person is at the very end of life. When that time does come, palliative care will provide the care and support needed to address pain and symptoms which may be present when a person is approaching death.

After a person's death, palliative care will continue to support their families and carers through grief and bereavement.

What care is provided by palliative care?

Palliative care is person and family-centred, and the care offered will be dependent on an individual's needs and circumstances. It can include:

- Relief of pain and other symptoms e.g. vomiting, shortness of breath
- Medication management
- Food and nutrition advice and support
- Care and education to support better mobility and sleeping
- Resources such as equipment needed to aid care at home
- Assistance for families to come together to talk about sensitive issues
- Links to other services such as home help and financial support
- Support for people to meet cultural obligations
- Support for emotional, social and spiritual concerns
- Counselling and grief support for the person with the illness and their family and carers
- Referrals to respite care services
- Bereavement care to the family and carers once the person has died.

Who provides palliative care?

Palliative care can be provided by a range of health professionals and other support services. Depending on a person's situation, palliative care is often provided by GPs and other treating doctors. Aged care services provide palliative care support in both residential aged care facilities and in homes.

When symptoms become complex or distressing (particularly pain or problems such as vomiting and breathlessness), referral to a specialist palliative care service is advisable. A specialist palliative care service may offer both inpatient and outpatient support, delivered by a palliative care physician or a palliative care nurse practitioner, supported by a palliative care team.

Palliative care teams may include people from a range of health and social support professions and backgrounds including:

- Doctors
- Nurses
- Allied health professional
- Social workers
- Pharmacists
- Physiotherapists
- Occupational and speech therapists
- Psychologists
- Dietitians
- Spiritual/pastoral practitioners
- Palliative care trained volunteers.

Where is palliative care provided?

Palliative care is provided where the person and their family wants to be, where possible. This may include:

- Within a general practice or primary health care clinic
- In a person's home
- A palliative care outpatients facility
- In hospital
- In a hospice (a dedicated health facility caring for people approaching the end of life)
- In a residential aged care facility.

How is palliative care accessed?

For help and information, or referral to a palliative care service, ask your:

- Doctor
- Nurse
- Allied health professional
- Aboriginal Health Worker
- Hospital Liaison Officer
- Social Worker
- Aged Care Service Coordinator or Care Worker.

Palliative care identifies and treats symptoms which may be physical, emotional, spiritual or social.



Palliative care helps people living with a life-limiting illness to live as well as they can by managing pain and symptoms to ensure their quality of life is maintained.



Where can I find more information?

For more information visit palliativecare.org.au or contact the palliative care peak body in your relevant state or territory palliativecare.org.au/members



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