

Mr Aaron Harper MP
Chair
Health, Communities, Disability Services and Domestic and Family Violence Prevention Committee
PARLIAMENT HOUSE QLD 4000

By email: careinquiry@parliament.qld.gov.au

Dear Mr. Harper

The Australian College of Nursing (ACN) would like to thank Queensland Parliament's Health Committee for the opportunity to provide comments relating to the inquiry into aged care, end-of-life and palliative care, and voluntary assisted dying.

ACN acknowledges where introduced, legislation within jurisdictions that legalise voluntary assisted dying will pose many ethical, personal and professional issues for families, carers, health professionals, non clinical workers and volunteers who work in organisations providing end of life care.

First and foremost people with life limiting conditions must be treated with dignity and respect, and supported to explore all available end of life options. This includes advanced care planning, voluntary assisted dying if requested and where this is legally available in the jurisdiction. At all times care must be taken to ensure that any individual can receive safe, compassionate, competent end of life care regardless of seeking information about voluntary assisted dying.

Within any setting, where end of life care is offered, there may be different views on what care options should be offered and accessed at the end of life. Health professionals, care workers and volunteers should always be supported to work within their own professional or personal ethical values whilst continuing to provide safe quality compassionate care to people living with a life limiting illness.

Inter-professional learning based on profession and scope of practice are essential to prepare those working within any setting providing end of life care. Cultural awareness and culturally safe practice is a vital part of learning at all levels. Education opportunities should be provided on legal frameworks and processes on how to address voluntary assisted dying requests in individual jurisdictions.

Last year ACN released a Position Statement, 'Voluntary Assisted Dying in Victoria', following the State's decision to legalise Voluntary Assisted Dying. ACN advocates that all people with a life-limiting diagnosis receive high quality, evidence-based health care and have access to appropriate services such as specialist palliative care. ACN acknowledges that nurses and all members of the community will have views on Voluntary Assisted Dying but stresses that high-quality nursing care for all at end of life is responsive to the needs, preferences and values of people, their families and carers. ACN promotes the prioritisation of patient-centred communication which ensures a person's

wishes are acknowledged and autonomy is respected. The Position Statement can be viewed here: <https://www.acn.edu.au/wp-content/uploads/2018/10/Voluntary-Assisted-Dying-in-Victoria.pdf>.

ACN last month launched a new White Paper, the 'Regulation of the Unregulated Health Care Workforce across the Health Care System'. In this White Paper ACN calls for the regulation of unregulated health care workers (UHCWs) to achieve nationally consistent nomenclature/titles, minimum educational and ongoing professional development requirements and standards for scope of practice. Ensuring such regulation will provide a level of safety for all Australians across all health care settings, particularly aged care settings, as well as for UHCWs and registered nurses (RNs) responsible for their supervision. ACN encourages all governments at all jurisdictional levels to undertake policy reform which provides minimum safe RN staffing levels, and appropriate skills and 'skill-mix' in all health care settings, as well as urging the Australian Government to amend the *Aged Care Act 1997* (Cth) to mandate safe staffing and 'skill-mix' levels. ACN's White Paper can be accessed here: <https://www.acn.edu.au/wp-content/uploads/white-paper-regulation-unregulated-health-care-workforce-across-health-care-system.pdf>.

ACN is the pre-eminent and national leader of the nursing profession and a community of dynamic and passionate nurses. We are committed to our intent of advancing nurse leadership to enhance the health care of all Australians. Leadership skills in any occupation drive change, but in the nursing profession, leadership skills are vital to patient care and advocacy, regardless of your title or position. Nurses with leadership skills are change makers, taking a holistic, patient-centred approach to care.

Please do not hesitate to contact ACN's Policy and Advocacy Manager, Dr Carolyn Stapleton FACN at carolyn.stapleton@acn.edu.au if you would like further information.

Yours sincerely



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