



Australian College of Nursing

Palliative and end-of-life care in aged care: A response to the findings of the Royal Commission into Aged Care Quality and Safety

PERSPECTIVE BRIEF

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KEY MESSAGES

Nurses hold the requisite educational preparation, skill, and competence for the provision of high-quality palliative and end-of-life care services, which ably address the specific requirements identified in the Royal Commission into Aged Care Quality and Safety Final Report (2021), including:

1. Putting the end-of-life care need needs of older people first, ensuring every older person's needs, wishes and preferences are acknowledged as part of their care and in accordance with their advanced care directive
2. Supporting older people to receive care in the location of their choice and according to the older person's circumstances and preferences
3. Supporting older people to exercise choice about their own lives and make decisions to the fullest extent possible, including being involved in the planning and delivery of their care.

ACN calls for immediate Australian Government action which addresses other critical reforms in aged care to ensure quality palliative care is accessible to all, including:

- regulation of unregulated workers in aged care (Australian College of Nursing, 2019a)
- mandatory end-of-life care for all workers in aged care
- nursing representation in all forums to ensure changes to the Act incorporate attention to palliative care.

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Palliative and end-of-life care is care that optimises the quality of life for individuals approaching the end of life, and their families, with a focus on reducing suffering and promoting dignity (NSW Health, 2019). With an ageing population, the demand for palliative and end-of-life care is increasing (NSW Health, 2019).

Access to palliative care is a human right, and palliative care should be available to all who need it, especially older people (Worldwide Hospice Palliative Care Alliance, 2020). In their final report released in March, 2021, the Royal Commission into Aged Care Quality and Safety (The Royal Commission) stated that older people receiving end-of-life care have a right to fair, equitable, and non-discriminatory access to palliative and end-of-life care (The Royal Commission, 2021).

Consistent with the Royal Commission's recommendations, ACN strongly endorses Palliative Care Australia's position that palliative care must be considered core business in aged care (Palliative Care Australia, 2021).

BACKGROUND

As the number of people using aged care services in Australia continues to grow, ACN calls on the Australian Government for urgent action to optimise the central contribution that nurses make to high-quality palliative and end-of-life care for older people (Australian College of Nursing, 2019b). Registered and enrolled nurses are well placed for the role as the largest group of health care professionals practising in Australia, who are responsible for the assessment, planning, implementation, and evaluation of the provision of palliative and end-of-life care in residential and community aged care services.

Access to care providers who are skilled and competent in palliative and end-of-life care is a key priority (NSW Health, 2019). Nurses are highly skilled at engaging with residents/clients with a life-limiting illness, as well as their families and other care providers to ensure that their values, beliefs, and perceptions are recognised (Australian College of Nursing, 2020) and ensuring continuity of care and skilled responses to physical, emotional, social and spiritual needs of people with life-limiting illness (Australian College of Nursing, 2019b).

RECOMMENDATIONS

Renewed systems, funding, and training to support nurses working in aged care to provide high-quality palliative and end-of-life care are urgently required (Palliative Care Australia, 2021), including resources to optimise the essential contribution of nurses in this care. Such targeted system reforms should include:

1. improved funding to
 - build service provision, education, and professional development programs, and practice development opportunities for aged care staff involved in the provision of palliative and end-of-life care
 - support the establishment and evaluation of nurse-led models of palliative care in aged care
 - align and expand quality indicators and evaluation measures with resident and family needs and preferences for palliative and end-of-life care
2. policy, system, and legislative reforms to remove structural barriers which limit the scope of practice for nurses providing palliative care in aged care settings
3. a workforce planning activity to ensure sufficient numbers of nurses are available to meet the growing demand for nurses to provide palliative care in aged care settings (Australian College of Nursing, 2019b)
4. models which enable nurses to address the unique needs of older Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities and those from culturally and linguistically diverse backgrounds.

CONCLUSION

ACN has a range of resources that can support quality end-of-life care for older people, including an implementation toolkit to support health and aged care service providers to establish nurse-led palliative care services, thereby recognising and optimising nurses' contribution to palliative and end-of-life care (Australian College of Nursing, 2020). [The ACN toolkit](#) provides guidance on developing, implementing, and evaluating nurse-led palliative and end-of-life care services to support people with life-limiting conditions (Australian College of Nursing, 2020), and aged care services require resources and support to implement the guidance presented in the toolkit.

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