

Promoting Advance Care Planning and building compassionate communities in WA

Advance Care Planning and the building of compassionate communities are recognised as key strategies to ensure Western Australians receive the health treatment and care they want at end of life. Increasing awareness and uptake of Advance Care Planning (ACP) processes can both optimise patient-centred care and avoid futile medical treatments.

In WA, Advance Care Planning encourages Western Australians to reflect on their own values and life priorities and have conversations with family and loved ones about end-of-life planning. ACP enables people to make decisions about future health care, treatment options (including refusal of treatment), place of death, organ and tissue and donation and management of assets.

For some, access to voluntary euthanasia is about access to choice at end-of-life. Advance care planning gives people choices but many are not aware of the treatment and care choices currently available to them.

Since 2015, PCWA has been delivering Advance Care Planning workshops to the Western Australian community with collaboration with WA Local Government - currently funded by WA Department of Health. The workshops continue to be highly successful both in terms of community education and inter-agency collaboration.

In 2016 PCWA initiated the WA Advance Care Planning Consortium – a cross sector agency committed to jointly developing and promoting strategies to facilitate the uptake of Advance Care Planning and building compassionate communities in WA. The Consortium has 16 members organisations including Silver Chain WA, Alzheimer’s Australia, Health Consumers Council, Cancer Council WA and Dr Simon Towler, former WA Chief Medical Officer. The one-off funding to support PCWA’s workshops and the Consortium ends in April 2017. It is imperative for the promotion of better patient choices and long term reduction in the tertiary health care burden that PCWA and the Consortium continues this highly valuable work.

Studies have shown that ACP along with the building of compassionate communities can reduce unnecessary hospitalisation of aged care residents by 40%-80%.

In a south-west region of the UK there has been a 25-30% decrease in emergency hospital admissions following a three year community development project that supported GPs to undertake patient-centred goal setting and community-networked care planning with chronically ill patients.

Advance Care Planning increases people’s satisfaction with the care they receive and they are more likely to die at home rather than in hospital.

In 2015, the WA Clinical Senate recommended the development of a *“...Public Awareness Campaign in partnership with key stakeholders to enhance community understanding of the limits of medical interventions, the benefits of palliative care and the importance of taking up the opportunity to develop an Advanced Health Directive and Advance Care Planning in relation to life-limiting conditions with their family, GP and other health professionals.”*

PCWA proposes funding of \$5 million over four years a comprehensive and coordinated statewide health promotion campaign that promotes public awareness, health professional education, consumer engagement, and uptake of Advance Care Planning. The campaign would support ATSI and CaLD communities to develop and implement appropriate ACP engagement and uptake strategies.

Establishing a state-wide palliative care patient and family information support service.

Currently there is no service that provides information and assistance to people (their families and support networks) living with a life-limiting or terminal illness to navigate the complex range of primary and tertiary health and community services available. This causes confusion and distress for many patients and their families and can delay timely access to palliative and supportive care services. Increasing numbers of patients, families and carers contact PCWA seeking practical information about palliative care, support services and emotional support at a challenging and stressful time. Currently PCWA receives no funding to provide this service and does not have the capacity to respond in a timely manner and many calls go unanswered.

PCWA proposes the establishment of a state-wide telephone consumer support service to promote timely access to palliative care, Advance Care Planning, grief support and related community and health services. This would be modelled on the Queensland PalAssist Service established in 2015 – www.palassist.org.au.

**PCWA proposes the establishment of a WA PalAssist service
\$2.5 million over 4 years**

Upgrading access to palliative care at Joondalup and Midland Health Campuses.

Studies have shown that hospital palliative care services are cost effective and assure better care for patients at the end of life, both for those who die in hospital and those who are discharged to die at home.¹ Anecdotal evidence from consumers at Joondalup Health campus suggest that palliative care services are not readily available or meeting the needs of patients and their families. PCWA understands the palliative care service is currently operating at Level 2 with no specialist palliative care nursing. The WA Health Clinical Services Framework 2014-2024 indicates Level 5 Palliative Care services will be available in 2018/19. Midland Health Campus currently has no palliative care services.

PCWA urges the acceleration of this service development to ensure a Level 5 service be available at Joondalup Health Campus within the stated time frame, particularly given the large projected population increase in that region over the next 10 years. PCWA recommends that a Level 4 Palliative Care service be implemented at Midland Health Campus.

Increased access to regional palliative care social work services

Currently there are only part-time palliative care social work positions in regional palliative care teams. Case loads are such that regional palliative care social workers are not able to service areas beyond the major regional centres. Rural and regional palliative care patients do not have access to the vital support services that the social workers provide, particularly around care planning and service coordination. As there are very few social work services available in rural and remote areas, this leaves palliative care patients and their families isolated and unsupported compared to those in the Perth metropolitan area and regional centres.

PCWA highly recommends that all regional palliative care social positions become fulltime
