

07 July 2011

Jenny Goyder
Primary Care Network
WA Department of Health
PO Box 8172
PERTH BC WA 6849

Dear Jenny

WA Primary Health Care Strategy

Palliative Care WA Inc has considered the *WA Primary Health Care Strategy – consultation document*. Palliative Care WA Inc supports the strategies outlined in the document.

We welcome the Department of Health's commitment to continue to develop and reform primary health care in Western Australia. Palliative Care WA Inc also notes and applauds the Department's intention to ensure, as much as possible, a fit with the Commonwealth's current wave of health reforms. Primary health care providers play a central role in caring for Western Australians at the end of the life,¹ so it was pleasing to see several mentions of palliative care.

We ask the WA Primary Care Strategy Working Group to consider the following points:

1. Approximately 13,000 people die in Western Australia each year.² We estimate that about 9,000 of these deaths are caused by the exacerbation of an already-diagnosed long term health problem.³ People live in the community with serious life limiting illnesses for, in some cases, many years, developing long-term relationships with their primary care providers (palliative care services are typically involved for short periods). Consumers can benefit when providers are able to recognise those who are dying⁴ and have a detailed understanding and acceptance of a palliative approach to care.⁵ Primary health care providers are particularly well placed to assist consumers with advance care planning: they are likely to have the time and rapport with clients which is necessary for quality advance care planning.
2. Each year in Western Australia 4,000 people die whose usual place of residence is recorded as an aged care facility.⁶ End of life care is core business for the aged care sector and these primary care providers need workforce and organisational development, plus ongoing practical support from specialist services, in order to ensure client and resident care is safe and appropriate.⁷
3. Specialist palliative care services support approximately 5,000 people each year in Western Australia: less than a third are admitted to a specialist palliative care inpatient facility, where the average length of stay is less than ten days.⁸ Not everybody needs specialist input from palliative care services at the end of life, but those who do, and their primary health care providers, will benefit from clear and consistent referral pathways and access criteria.⁹
4. The population of Western Australia is growing and ageing. The total number deaths in Western Australia will increase steadily for at least the next 40 years, while the proportion of 'expected' deaths from long-term health conditions will also grow. At the same time the availability of carers in the community will decrease.¹⁰ End of life care will increase as a proportion of the total workload of primary health care providers. The capacity of the primary health care sector to provide quality care for large numbers of people at the end of life will need to expand.¹¹ Improving the skills and understanding of individual health care professionals¹² and optimising the structures and systems in which they work¹³ will require ongoing attention and investment from all levels of government and the private health sector.

As a member of Palliative Care Australia, Palliative Care WA Inc promotes the *Standards for providing quality palliative care for all Australians*.¹⁴ The Standards apply to all healthcare providers, and primary health care criteria are provided. Palliative Care WA Inc would appreciate the opportunity to work with the Department of Health to consider ways in which the Standards might be employed to improve the safety and quality of end of life care in the primary care sector.

I enclose, for your information, the following:

- *Health system reform and care at the end of life: A guidance document*
- *Standards for providing quality palliative care for all Australians*
- *A guide to palliative care service development: A population based approach*
- *Primary health care and end of life: Position Statement*.¹⁵

The President of Palliative Care WA Inc, Mr Andrew Allsop, and I would be very pleased to meet with you and other members of the WA Primary Care Strategy Working Group to further discuss the development of better end of life care in primary care in Western Australia, simply contact me at this office or call direct on 0412 412 532 to arrange an appointment.

Yours sincerely

Will Hallahan
Executive Officer

¹ *Health system reform and care at the end of life: A guidance document* – National End of Life Framework Forum – 2010 – Guidance Elements 9.1-9.3 – p 71

² *3302DO001_2008 Deaths, Australia, 2008* – Australian Bureau of Statistics – www.abs.gov.au

³ *3303.0 - Causes of Death, Australia, 2009* – Australian Bureau of Statistics – www.abs.gov.au

⁴ op cit – National End of Life Framework Forum – p 33-34

⁵ *Standards for Providing Quality Palliative Care for all Australians* – Palliative Care Australia – May 2005 – p 11

⁶ *Residential Aged Care in Australia 2008-09* – Australian Institute of Health & Welfare – 2010 – p 142

⁷ op cit – National End of Life Framework Forum – Guidance Elements 9.5 & 9.7 – p 71

⁸ *PCOC Report 10: Western Australia July to December 2010* – Palliative Care Outcomes Collaboration – Mar 2011

⁹ *A guide to palliative care service development: A population based approach* – Palliative Care Australia – Feb 2005 – p 34

¹⁰ *Who's going to care? Informal care and an ageing population* – NATSEM University of Canberra – 2004

¹¹ 'Living long in fragile health: The new demographics shape end of life care' – J Lynn – in *Improving end of life care – Why has it been so difficult? Hastings Centre Report Special Report 35 - # 6* – 2005

¹² op cit – National End of Life Framework Forum – Guidance Elements 10.2, 10.3 and 10.6 – pp 72-73

¹³ ibid – Guidance Domain 9 – pp 70-71

¹⁴ op cit

¹⁵ *Primary health care and end of life: Position Statement* – Palliative Care Australia – 2010

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