

MEDIA RELEASE

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Palliative Care Doctors welcome Health Select Committee report on ‘Assisted Dying’

The Australian and New Zealand Society of Palliative Medicine (ANZSPM) Aotearoa Branch has welcomed the report from the NZ Health Select Committee investigating the attitudes of New Zealanders to ‘assisted dying’ as well-written and balanced. ANZSPM is encouraged that inequities in Specialist Palliative Care service provision, resource and funding have been highlighted and looks forward to the Governments’ response.

ANZSPM Aotearoa Chair, Dr Salina Iupati (Palliative Care Specialist), said: “The Committee has researched and investigated most angles of what they note is a complicated and contentious issue. Ultimately, they found 80% of the almost 22,000 submissions were not in favour of changing the legislation.”

Dr Amanda Landers (Palliative Care Specialist and ANZSPM member who made a submission in her role as previous Chair of ANZSPM Aotearoa) said: “The report is a document every health professional and Member of Parliament should read to truly understand the complex nature of this topic and hear the voices of the New Zealand public”.

While submitters to the report had varied views on palliative care, Dr Landers said: “there was a general consensus that palliative care and hospice services need more resources, aligned with the wider health system. Importantly, the report urges government to *‘consider whether hospices should be funded as a core health service, rather than as a service that relies on some community fundraising’*.”

Dr Landers pointed out that a review of adult palliative care services was completed by the Ministry of Health just last year. She said “that earlier report revealed that the demand for this type of care will increase by 51% by 2038 which equates to thousands of New Zealanders. It also reported a shortage of palliative care specialists in some areas of New Zealand, particularly in rural regions, and an action plan was developed at a national level to help address this increase in demand.”

ANZSPM Aotearoa noted that the Committee heard of varied end of life experiences from families but also found that family members frequently misunderstand what is happening to their loved one, which can create a perception that palliative care was ineffective. The report suggests: “*It is clear that better communication is needed by some palliative care workers to ensure that not only the patients, but family and friends, fully appreciate what is happening*”.

Dr Iupati responded to this suggestion, saying: “This is a challenge for our members and all those working in specialised palliative care. We welcome opportunities to participate in conversations with New Zealand society around death, dying and end of life care. We seek community and government support to promote open discussion of death in New Zealand society and to help develop a better understanding of questions such as: *What does death look like in our society? How can we as a nation be better prepared and equipped to care for those who are dying?*”

ANZSPM is a Medical Society that facilitates professional development and support for its members and promotes the practice of palliative medicine. Our members are medical practitioners who provide care for people with a life-threatening illness.

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