

MEDIA RELEASE

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Palliative Medicine peak body calls for strengthened palliative care after assisted dying vote

The Australian and New Zealand Society of Palliative Medicine (ANZSPM) acknowledges yesterday's decision in the Victorian Parliament to introduce legislation to enable physician assisted dying in prescribed circumstances, following shortly on from a decision of the NSW Parliament to reject similar legislation. ANZSPM urges that the current focus on end-of-life care should not stop with debate on assisted dying legislation.

"ANZSPM advocates, and its members deliver, excellent quality care for people living with life threatening illness by proactive assessment, treatment and prevention of physical, psychological, social and spiritual concerns; and support for caregivers. Consistent with international best practice, ANZSPM's published [Position Statement on Euthanasia and Physician Assisted Suicide](#) confirms that the discipline of Palliative Medicine does *not* include the practices of euthanasia or physician assisted suicide", ANZSPM President, Professor Meera Agar, said.

Professor Agar emphasised that regardless of whether a person requests access to assisted dying or not, attention is urgently needed to ensure they also have choice and timely access to high quality care that addresses symptom control, psychological support, and values preferences such as care in the location of one's choosing; and includes specialist palliative medicine referral for all who need it.

"Yesterday's decision by the Victorian Parliament should not detract attention away from the significant deficits in the provision of palliative care in Australia, including in Victoria, as highlighted in the [Final Report of the Victorian Government's own Inquiry into end of life choices](#). Similar gaps in the provision of palliative care were identified in NSW, reflected in the [NSW Auditor-General's Report](#).

"What the assisted dying legislation fails to deal with is the pressing need to address those deficits in palliative care, that have far reaching and serious negative impacts on the quality of life and decision-making for people at the end-of-life and their carers. We are concerned that the legislative debate has already diverted critical attention away from the larger problem of service gaps for the broader population of people currently receiving end-of-life care, for whom the priority is access to high quality palliative care and support."

ANZSPM calls on the Victorian Government and members of parliament to continue to urgently focus attention on health reform and investment, particularly the 48 other recommendations clearly outlined in the [Final Report of the Inquiry into end of life choices](#), which will immediately strengthen palliative and end-of-life care in Victoria.

"There are several key outcomes in that report that the Victorian Government must now address and which other governments around Australia should give critical attention to", said Professor Agar.

"In particular:

- remedying shortages in the palliative care workforce (including in specialist medical, nursing and allied health fields),
- ongoing training for the generalist health workforce,
- policy directions which support and value advance care planning and patient preference,
- initiatives to support high quality palliative care regardless of setting (hospitals, community, residential aged care) to ensure improved access to high quality care for all people with life threatening illness, and
- increased carer support including opportunity for quality respite care – the importance of addressing the sense of being a burden, commonly experienced by many people at the end of their lives, cannot be neglected."

Ends.

ANZSPM is a specialty medical society that facilitates professional development for its members and promotes the practice of palliative medicine, in order to improve the quality of care for people with life threatening illness. Our members are medical practitioners who provide care for people with a life-threatening illness and include palliative medicine specialists, palliative medicine training registrars and other doctors such as general practitioners, oncologists, haematologists, intensivists, psychiatrists and geriatricians. Ninety-two (92) of ANZSPM members are currently based in Victoria and ninety-three (93) are based in NSW, out of nearly five hundred (500) members across Australia and New Zealand.

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