

MEDIA RELEASE

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Palliative Medicine peak body welcomes recommendations for strengthened palliative care in the ACT

The Australian and New Zealand Society of Palliative Medicine (ANZSPM) welcomes yesterday's report of the Select Committee on End of Life Choices in the ACT, in particular the recommendations for expansion of palliative care services in the ACT.

The report makes twenty-four (24) recommendations, including twelve (12) focused on improvements in palliative care services in the ACT. Recommendations highlight the need for improvement in a number of areas of palliative care delivery in the ACT, including in relation to care equity; improving local government attention on palliative care delivery and programs to support quality care provision; and benchmarking against other jurisdictions.

ANZSPM President, Professor Meera Agar, said:

"ANZSPM welcomes the Select Committee's recommendations for strengthened palliative care delivery in the ACT and promotion of advance care planning. Equity of access to high quality palliative care and support, including specialist palliative medicine referral, is critical and the recommendations, if implemented, will go some way to achieving that for people living in the ACT."

Key recommendations welcomed by ANZSPM as timely for the ACT community and the local palliative care sector include:

- calling for adequate funding to support the increased operating costs resulting from the expansion of Clare Holland House;
- improving counselling and support services available for people delivering palliative care;
- investment in education of clinicians and community members regarding advance care planning;
- investment in campaigns to improve the community's understanding of palliative care; and
- improving death-literacy of Canberrans.

The report identifies a number of areas where the palliative care needs of ACT residents may currently be unmet and acknowledges that care needs are likely to grow over time.

"Any enhancement to palliative care services in the ACT needs to ensure access in regional areas and must cover acute hospital, residential care and community-based services. The Committee has recommended further review and assessment is undertaken for a number of key areas. For example, in relation to development of an acute palliative care unit at Canberra Hospital or the need for additional respite or in-home palliative care options. The report's suggestion that further work is needed to respond to these challenges highlights the complexity of the issues, but also the urgency of continued work towards a solution", Prof Agar said.

Prof Agar emphasised that the recommendations for review and assessment of current palliative care services in the ACT should be just a starting point from which further actions can be developed:

"It is important that any review by the government of current services across different care settings is followed up by investment in the necessary resources and training to implement changes to support improved accessibility for Canberrans.

"ANZSPM welcomes a continued conversation with the ACT Government and MLAs on the important issues around provision of end of life care and calls on the ACT Government to commit to implementing the recommendations in the Report and to strengthen palliative and end-of-life care in the ACT."

ANZSPM is a society for medical practitioners, aiming to improve health outcomes by working with and influencing the system and community around the person with a life-limiting illness. ANZSPM facilitates professional development for its members and promotes the practice of palliative medicine, in order to improve quality of care for people with a life-limiting illness. Our members are medical practitioners and include palliative medicine specialists, palliative medicine training registrars and other doctors such as general practitioners, oncologists, haematologists, intensivists, psychiatrists and geriatricians. Eight (8) of our members are currently based in the ACT, out of more than five hundred (500) members across Australia and New Zealand.

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