

MEDIA RELEASE

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Inequity in palliative care services highlighted by government committee

The Australian and New Zealand Society of Palliative Medicine (ANZSPM) welcomes yesterday's report of the New Zealand Parliament's Justice Committee on the End of Life Choice Bill and the Committee's decision that it was unable to agree that the Bill be passed.

ANZSPM agrees with the Committee's finding that the Bill is not workable in its present state and maintains the view that the Bill represents an unacceptable risk to members of the community and medical practitioners in New Zealand.

ANZSPM Aotearoa Committee Chair, Dr Rachel Wiseman said that the report affirmed concerns about inadequacies in the current system for end of life care that must be addressed by the government as a priority. Highlighting the report's reference to an acknowledgement by the Ministry of Health of shortfalls in palliative care nationally, and in particular inequity in access to palliative care, Dr Wiseman said:

"Whilst palliative care provision in New Zealand is highly regarded internationally, the sector is facing significant challenges around inequities in services across the country, particularly in rural and remote regions. Adequate, reliable funding that does not rely on the fundraising efforts of individual hospices is essential to address these inequities.

"We are concerned that the debate on this Bill has already diverted attention and resources away from those critical issues of equity of access and the quality of care and support available to all New Zealanders with a life limiting illness."

ANZSPM put forward in its submission to the Committee that the solution to suffering and loss of dignity as one approaches the dying phase lies in improving care. Dr Wiseman said:

"We agree that a short-term goal is to better understand what palliative care is needed nationally, but more direct action could be taken immediately to invest in workforce and resource challenges that are already known within the sector. ANZSPM is ready to work with the Ministry and other key organisations in the palliative care sector to help develop workable solutions to address these challenges and we would welcome closer involvement on these issues."

Ends.

Contact:

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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. 124 of our members are currently based in New Zealand, out of a current total of 507 members across Australia and New Zealand.