



29 April 2022

Dr Tim Senior
Chair
RACGP Working Group – Standards for Health Services in Australian Prisons
email: standards@racgp.org.au

Dear Dr Senior

RE: Standards for Health Services in Australian Prisons

We are writing regarding the update of the *Standards for Health Services in Australian Prisons* (the Standards) currently being undertaken by the RACGP. Palliative Care Australia (PCA) and the Australian and New Zealand Society of Palliative Medicine (ANZSPM) would like to jointly advocate for the inclusion of more comprehensive palliative care content within the Standards.

PCA is the national peak body for palliative care and represents those who work towards high quality palliative care for all Australians who need it. Working closely with consumers, our Member Organisations and the palliative care workforce, we aim to improve access to, and promote palliative care.

ANZSPM is a specialty medical society that facilitates professional development and support for its members. ANZSPM promotes the discipline and practice of palliative medicine to improve the quality of care delivered to patients and families living with life-limiting illnesses. Our members include palliative medicine specialists as well as primary health and other medical practitioners, who either practice or have an interest in palliative medicine.

PCA and ANZSPM are concerned about the lack of content regarding palliative care in the Standards. This is of particular concern given Australia's rapidly ageing prison population, prisoners experiencing age-related health conditions earlier than people in the community and the overall poorer physical and mental health of the general prison populationⁱ.

PCA and ANSZPM believe that any content in the Standards relating to palliative care in prisons should take the following into consideration:

- Palliative care in prisons should align with the World Health Organization (WHO) definition:
'Palliative care is an approach that improves the quality of life of patients and their families facing the problem associated with life-threatening illness, through the prevention and relief of suffering by means by means of early identification and impeccable assessment and treatment of pain and other problems, physical, psychosocial and spiritual'ⁱⁱ.
- Access to palliative care is a human right.
- Prisoners should be able to access palliative care services with minimal disruption to their current routine and location e.g., many prisoners are currently required to move to maximum security metropolitan prisons to access treatment and palliative services.

- Prisoners should have access to appropriate treatments and medications, including pain relief, when they require it. They should also be actively engaged in advance care planning and supported to make choices regarding their end of life.
- Health professionals should be provided with clear protocols for interacting with prisoners who require palliative care and be given appropriate access to the prisoner to build a therapeutic alliance.
- There should a compassionate approach to visitation for prisoners who are palliative and the opportunity to make final requests, where possible.

We would encourage the Working Group to make contact with the [Palliative Care in Prisons Project](#) overseen by the University of Technology Sydney (UTS) which aims to improve access to best evidence-based, culturally-safe, high quality palliative and end-of-life care for people in prisons, through the collaborative co-design of a new *National Framework for the Provision of Palliative Care in Australian Prisons*. This project also has a Project Advisory Group and an Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Community Engagement Strategy Working Group that could both provide valuable input. You can contact the project at: palcareprisons@uts.edu.au

You may also wish to make contact with St Vincent's Hospital, Melbourne who have undertaken research in relation to palliative care for people in prison and provides palliative care for prisoners: <https://pursuit.unimelb.edu.au/articles/caring-for-the-terminally-ill-in-prison> This work is led by Professor Jennifer Philip, Chair, Palliative Medicine, Centre for Cancer Research, Faculty of Medicine, Dentistry and Health Sciences, University of Melbourne; St Vincent's Hospital, email: jphilip@unimelb.edu.au

Further, it would be valuable for the Working Group to explore what data is currently available or could be collected relating to the Australian prison population's access to palliative care and whether current need is being met.

If you have any queries relation to the issues outlined above, please feel free to contact Katie Snell, National Policy Manager, Aged Care and Diverse Needs Groups, PCA at katie.snell@palliativecare.org.au or phone 02 6232 0700.

Yours sincerely,



Camilla Rowland
Chief Executive Office
Palliative Care Australia



Janice Besch
Chief Executive Officer
**Australian and New Zealand Society of
Palliative Medicine**

ⁱ Australian Institute of Health and Welfare (8 July 2020). *Health and Ageing of Australia's prisoners 2018*. Retrieved from: <https://www.aihw.gov.au/reports/prisoners/health-and-ageing-of-australias-prisoners-2018/contents/table-of-contents>

ⁱⁱ World Health Assembly, Strengthening of Palliative Care as a Component of Comprehensive Care Throughout the Life Course, WHA Res 67.19, 67th session, 9th plen mtg, Agenda Item 15.5, A67/VR/9 (24 May 2014) 2.