

Palliative Care

What is palliative care?

Palliative care is person and family-centred care that is focused on comfort, quality of life and a patient's total well-being when a person has an active, progressive, life-limiting or terminal illness.

Palliative care plays an important role after diagnosis, during and after treatment, including supportive treatment to help manage symptom burden, and at the end of life. Palliative care is appropriate at any time during the cancer journey. People who access palliative care early tend to have improved quality of life and reduced distress due to symptoms.

Recent studies show that people who have early palliative care lived longer, with fewer symptoms and had better quality of life than patients who did not have palliative care.

Who provides palliative care?

Patients may receive palliative care from a wide range of people including primary care physicians and nurses, oncologists, palliative care specialists and nurse practitioners, other medical specialists, or hospice organisations. It can be provided alongside other treatments, or it can become the focus of care.

Palliative care guides families and carers through decision-making to allow them to work toward their healthcare goals. These goals may include the hope to prolong life and to encourage peace and dignity throughout the illness and at the end of life.

We're here to help

For more information about accessing palliative care services, and pain and symptom management, contact our Specialist Support Team on 1300 881 698 or email support@pancare.org.au.

This fact sheet is produced with the assistance of Palliative Care Australia (PCA), the national peak body for palliative care. PCA 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, PCA aim to improve access to, and promote palliative care. www.palliativecare.org.au.

What services are offered under palliative care?

Palliative care identifies and treats symptoms which may be physical, emotional, spiritual, or social and can be delivered anywhere, including at home, in a hospital or nursing home, through outpatient care or in any other setting. Because palliative care is based on individual needs, the services offered will differ but may include:

- Relief of pain and other symptoms e.g. vomiting, shortness of breath
- Resources such as equipment needed to aid care at home
- Assistance for families to come together to talk about sensitive issues
- Links to other services such as home help and financial support
- Support for people to meet cultural obligations
- Support for emotional, social and spiritual concerns
- Counselling and grief support
- Referrals to respite care services

Palliative care is a family-centred model of care, meaning that family and carers can receive practical and emotional support.

End-of-life Care

End-of-life care is provided in the last few weeks of life, in which a patient with a life-limiting illness is rapidly approaching death. The needs of patients and their carers is higher at this time.

This phase of palliative care is recognised as one in which increased services and support are essential to ensure quality, coordinated care from the health care team is being delivered. This takes into account the terminal phase or when the patient is recognised as imminently dying, death and extends to bereavement care.

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