

# Palliative Care



Palliative Care is care and support provided to people who have a progressive, life-limiting illness.

## What is Palliative Care?

Palliative Care is care and support provided to people who have a progressive, life-limiting illness. Palliative Care aims to improve the quality of life for patients, their families and carers by addressing their many needs; physical (including treatment assessment and management of pain and other symptoms), emotional, social, cultural and spiritual needs.

The care offered may include:

- Medical treatment
- Relief of pain and other symptoms e.g. vomiting, shortness of breath
- Access to resources such as equipment needed to aid care at home
- Assistance for families to come together to talk about sensitive issues
- Nursing care
- 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.

## Does Palliative Care signal the end?

It may be devastating to hear that your family member or friend is considering referral to Palliative Care services. Understand that being referred to Palliative Care is not in itself a prognosis. Some people receive Palliative Care for a few weeks or months, while an increasing number of people receive it over a number of years. Palliative Care does not try to end life sooner nor prolong life expectancy.

Some people opt to continue treatment while also accepting Palliative Care, but generally it represents a change in focus – from trying to find a cure, to living with an illness and managing symptoms in order to achieve the best possible quality of life.

Quality of life means different things to different people, but it might include:

- Being comfortable and pain free
- Being able to socialise and spend time with loved ones
- Being as independent as possible
- Not feeling like you are a burden on others
- Feeling emotionally well.

## Who can benefit from Palliative Care?

Palliative Care is for people of any age who have a serious illness that cannot be cured. This includes people with dementia, cancer, motor neurone disease or other neurological conditions, or end-stage kidney, heart or lung disease.

Palliative Care is also family-centred, offering families and carers practical and emotional support.

## When to start Palliative Care

The decision about when to contact a Palliative Care service provider rests with the person who is unwell, their GP and/or medical specialist. Some people may benefit from receiving Palliative Care services from the time they are diagnosed with a life-limiting illness. Others may find comfort in just connecting with a Palliative Care service during the early stages of their illness, so they know services will be available when they are required.

If their health stabilises or improves, then Palliative Care services can be stopped and accessed again later if required.

## Myths and misunderstandings

There are some commonly held myths about Palliative Care, so it is important to clarify the facts.

- People can continue medical treatment while also receiving Palliative Care. They do not have to cease all treatment options.
- Palliative Care focuses on more than just the last days and hours of life. It helps to achieve the best possible quality of life right from the early stages of illness.
- Palliative Care does not shorten or extend life through the use of medications, machines or technology. Rather, it focuses on providing comfort, support and respect.



## Who provides Palliative Care?

Palliative Care may be provided by a range of different health and allied care specialists depending on the needs of the person you are caring for, your needs and the resources of your family and friends. In many cases Palliative Care is provided by your doctor (GP and/or specialist) and nurses.

Your Palliative Care team may include:

- Your GP
- Specialist Palliative Care doctors and nurses
- Specialists specific for the condition e.g. cardiologist, neurologist
- Nurses
- Occupational therapists
- Physiotherapists
- Speech pathologists
- Social workers
- Pharmacists
- Counsellors
- Pastoral care workers
- Dietitians
- Personal care assistants
- Volunteers
- Administrative assistants and ancillary staff.

Palliative Care health professionals work in a range of settings, including outpatient clinics, community nursing teams, consultation teams (facilities and hospitals) and specialist Palliative Care units located in metropolitan, rural and remote areas.

The services provided vary with most, but not all, requiring a referral from your GP. Call your local Palliative Care Service to find out if you need a GP referral. The specialist Palliative Care teams liaise with GPs and primary healthcare teams to provide specialist advice and treatment based on the needs of the patient, their carer(s) and family.

People providing Palliative Care recognise that every person has different physical, emotional, practical and spiritual needs and that a holistic and an interdisciplinary approach is best. It is important that you and the person you are caring for discuss what services and supports are needed, and when and how they are delivered.

For more information visit:

 [health.nsw.gov.au/palliativecare/Pages/palliative-care-in-NSW.aspx](https://health.nsw.gov.au/palliativecare/Pages/palliative-care-in-NSW.aspx)



## Complementary, alternative and integrative therapies

Many people receiving Palliative Care explore therapies outside of conventional medicine and find them beneficial. It is wise to discuss these options with health professionals already managing conventional treatment or management so any potential side effects or undesirable interactions with medication are understood. Be careful not to presume that because something is deemed natural, it won't cause harm.

Complementary therapies aim to enhance quality of life and improve wellbeing. They are generally used in addition to conventional medical treatment. Many Palliative Care nurses and volunteers incorporate complementary practices into care, including massage, acupuncture, therapeutic touch, Reiki, music therapy, art therapy, visualisation, meditation and aromatherapy.

Alternative therapies are usually treatments which may be offered as an alternative to conventional treatments, although they are frequently used in addition. They include diets, and herbal and homeopathic therapies. There are varying levels of evidence for these therapies and some have been found to be harmful.

Integrative therapies offer a holistic approach that aims to provide co-ordinated care, utilising a variety of approaches.

The **Cancer Council NSW** website has a directory of complementary therapies and other helpful information:

[cancercouncil.com.au/  
cancer-information/living-well/  
complementary-therapies](https://cancercouncil.com.au/cancer-information/living-well/complementary-therapies)

## Psychosocial care needs

The person you are caring for will have both physical and psychosocial needs which are equally important to be addressed.

They may experience some intense feelings that are not easy to describe or understand. This is a normal response to their circumstances. People will be affected in very different ways and this may change over the course of the illness.

Fear is a strong human emotion and this unknown experience can be very frightening. Asking questions of health staff and gathering information from a range of credible sources can be comforting.

People with a life-limiting illness may experience:

- An urgent need to get their personal affairs in order.
- The desire to spend as much time as possible with family and friends or withdrawal from these networks.
- Anxiety and depression.
- A reduced ability to process information and make rational decisions.
- A reduced sense of influence and control within the family.

- Guilt regarding the impact of illness and care on others.
- Frustration at changing physical and mental ability.
- A desire to explore spiritual perspectives, religious beliefs and meaning-of-life issues.
- A sense of regret, a desire to reflect and possibly resolve issues from the past.

As a carer, it might help to:

- Take time to help them work through complex decisions.
- Encourage them to talk matters through with family and friends.
- Provide opportunities for them to try breathing techniques and other relaxation methods.
- Ensure they get regular sleep and exercise, and have social contact.
- Connect with a support group of people in similar circumstances.

If anxiety and depressive symptoms persist, seek medical advice or suggest professional counselling support. Try to ensure that care provided by family and friends is seen as a demonstration of love and respect and not a burden.

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## Useful contacts

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### Australian Indigenous Health InfoNet

-  (08) 9370 6336
-  [healthinonet.ecu.edu.au/learn/health-system/palliative-care](https://healthinonet.ecu.edu.au/learn/health-system/palliative-care)

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### Cancer Council NSW

-  13 11 20
-  [cancercouncil.com.au](https://cancercouncil.com.au)

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### Carer Gateway

-  1800 422 737
-  [carergateway.gov.au](https://carergateway.gov.au)

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### Carers NSW

-  (02) 9280 4744
-  [carersnsw.org.au](https://carersnsw.org.au)

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### Caresearch

-  (08) 7221 8233
-  [caresearch.com.au](https://caresearch.com.au)

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### Centrelink

-  13 27 17
-  [servicesaustralia.gov.au](https://servicesaustralia.gov.au)

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### Dementia Australia NSW

-  1800 100 500
-  [dementia.org.au](https://dementia.org.au)

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### GriefLine National

-  1300 845 745
-  [griefline.org.au](https://griefline.org.au)

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### Leukaemia Foundation

-  1800 620 420
-  [info@leukaemia.org.au](mailto:info@leukaemia.org.au)
-  [leukaemia.org.au](https://leukaemia.org.au)

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### Lifeline

-  13 11 14
-  [lifeline.org.au](https://lifeline.org.au)

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### My Aged Care

-  1800 200 422
  -  [myagedcare.gov.au](https://myagedcare.gov.au)
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### My Health Record

- 📞 1800 723 471
- 🖱️ [myhealthrecord.gov.au](https://myhealthrecord.gov.au)

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### National Disability Insurance Service (NDIS)

- 📞 1800 800 110
- 🖱️ [ndis.gov.au](https://ndis.gov.au)

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### National Stroke Foundation

- 📞 StrokeLine: 1800 787 653
- 🖱️ [strokefoundation.org.au](https://strokefoundation.org.au)

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### NSW Trustee & Guardian

- 📞 1300 109 290
- 🖱️ [tag.nsw.gov.au](https://tag.nsw.gov.au)

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### Palliative Care NSW

- 📞 (02) 8076 5600
- 🖱️ [palliativecarensw.org.au](https://palliativecarensw.org.au)

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### Relationships Australia

- 📞 1300 364 277
- 🖱️ [relationships.org.au](https://relationships.org.au)

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### Services Australia

- 📞 [servicesaustralia.gov.au/individuals/contact-us/phone-us](https://servicesaustralia.gov.au/individuals/contact-us/phone-us)
- 🖱️ [servicesaustralia.gov.au](https://servicesaustralia.gov.au)

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### The Department of Veteran's Affairs

- 📞 General enquiries: 1800 838 372
- 📞 Counselling Service: 1800 011 046
- 🖱️ [dva.gov.au](https://dva.gov.au)

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### If you require an interpreter, contact the Translating and Interpreting Service (TIS National)

- 📞 13 14 50
- 🖱️ [tisnational.gov.au](https://tisnational.gov.au)

### If you have a hearing or speech impairment, contact the National Relay Service

- 📞 24 hour relay call numbers  
TTY/voice calls: 133 677  
Speak and Listen: 1300 555 727  
SMS Relay: 0423 677 767
- 🖱️ [relayservice.gov.au](https://relayservice.gov.au)

Caring for someone as they approach the end of their life can be both rewarding and demanding. It is hoped that this book will help to explain what caring involves, so you are better equipped to make informed decisions which reflect your needs and circumstances.

**You matter.**



**Palliative Care**  
NEW SOUTH WALES

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