

Palliative Care in brief



Palliative Care is the specialised, multi-disciplinary and holistic care of someone living with a terminal illness.

The aim of Palliative Care is to maximize the quality of a person's life. This is achieved by coordinating and delivering a range of services in response to the individual needs of the person with palliative care needs and their family and friends.

Where can I get Palliative Care?

Palliative care is delivered, where possible, where the person wants to be. It can be provided in:

- the person's own home
- a hospice/palliative care unit
- a hospital
- a nursing home/Residential Aged Care Facility

Family, relatives and friends are often the main carers. In addition to their care, professional help can be arranged. Several people can help you organise this including your GP, community health care centre or local Palliative Care service.

When should I consider palliative care?

Palliative care can begin from the first diagnosis of a terminal illness. You and your family can access palliative care when you need and want support. Your needs might change as the disease stabilises and palliative care services might be reduced or stopped until further need arises.

How do you access palliative care?

Your GP or hospital doctor would usually refer you to a specialist palliative care service. However, you and your family can also contact your local service to discuss referral

Is palliative care only for people with cancer?

No. Palliative Care supports all people living with a terminal condition and their families and/or carers. This can include people living with end stage heart, lung, renal and liver disease and conditions like Motor Neurone Disease, AIDS and other serious progressive illnesses.

If I am in pain, can it be eased? What drugs are used for pain relief?

Yes. Palliative care specialists are specifically trained in this area. In almost all cases, pain can be overcome or made tolerable. In all cases it can be eased to some degree. It is better to take pain medication regularly to prevent pain rather than to let the pain return and then relieve it. Opioids are a family of drugs used to relieve pain

and other symptoms like breathlessness. Morphine is the best known and most commonly used opioid. Codeine is also a type of commonly used opioid.

It's important to know that morphine and other opioids (like codeine) are not psychologically addictive when properly prescribed for pain relief. Having morphine prescribed does not mean that death is close. Properly prescribed morphine will not hasten death – it can improve the quality and the length of remaining life.

It is very important for you to be able to speak openly about pain and discomfort and ask your doctor or nurse any question that is on your mind.

What is a Hospice?

A hospice or a palliative care unit in a hospital is a place where specially trained staff care for people living with a terminal condition in a home-like environment with hospital-like facilities and resources.

What if you do not speak or understand English very well?

The palliative care team is sensitive to your culture and language. Please do not hesitate to ask for an interpreter. You can use a qualified interpreter or a family member.

Thank you to Palliative Care Victoria for the source material for this fact sheet.