

ISSUE: END OF LIFE CARE AND CHOICES

Council on the Ageing (COTA) NSW Policy Position

COTA NSW supports the right of individuals to make informed decisions about, and to have control over, their end of life care in keeping with their beliefs and values. We support the right of people to have access to quality, affordable care that preserves their dignity, in settings of their choice where possible. The role, responsibilities and rights of family carers and other family members/close friends should be respected, to the extent that the dying person wishes them to be involved. Adequate bereavement care must also be provided. Assisted dying legislation should reflect the will of the majority of the community.

Rationale for COTA NSW's position

- Credible research demonstrates that many people experience poor end-of-life care and are not given access to palliative care at an early stage of their dying. This is a major problem in rural and remote areas and for people in marginalised groups, which raises questions of social justice.
- There is an increasing need for access to different types and quality of care including acute care, home care, residential care, hospital and hospice care.
- The majority of people say they want to die at home but only a small percentage are able to do so.
- Increasing demand and a diminishing nursing workforce has resulted in a lack of sustainability to deliver quality care across diverse settings. Additional resources are needed to address this issue.
- There is limited understanding in the general community of what is locally available for terminally ill people and their carers.
- The majority of people in NSW support legislative change to allow assisted dying under strict guidelines. Such legislation would potentially reduce suicide rates among older people.

Actions COTA NSW Calls For

- Increase opportunities for people to discuss death and dying, funerals and bereavement in safe, respectful forums that will result in more informed decisions about end-of-life care and choices.
- COTA NSW to provide education and information, including on COTA NSW and other social media sites to assist our members and the wider community, including health care professionals, to:
 - understand options for terminally ill people, in line with what is currently legally available;
 - access information about Advance Care Planning.
- All levels of government, in partnership with COTA Australia and other consumer organisations where relevant, to:
 - increase resources, including trained staffing ratios, for palliative and end-of-life care in home, residential, hospital and hospice care settings;
 - remove restrictions on access to superannuation and insurance for terminally ill people and their families.
- Promote community engagement in care by funding projects that facilitate health professionals and community members to work together, including through a “compassionate communities” approach to care and support for terminally ill people and their carers/families.
- NSW government to respond to community requests to introduce assisted-dying legislation.