

MEDIA RELEASE

28 February 2018

Western Australia Inquiry into End of Life Choices

Catholic Health Australia (CHA) welcomed today's opportunity to present to the Western Australia (WA) committee as part of the WA inquiry into end of life choices.

"CHA members are committed to providing the best possible, evidence based compassionate care to all members of society. Our members have always valued the delivery of person-centred care that is founded in a respect for human dignity and life," says Catholic Health Australia's CEO Suzanne Greenwood

"Based on our experience, high quality palliative and end of life care is the best option to allow freedom of choice, comfort, dignity and respect as a person nears the end of life, not just for the individual, but also for the family and community that surrounds them."

"CHA's view is that it is never permissible to purposefully end an individual's life through euthanasia or assisted suicide because we believe it compromises the inherent value of the person, and erodes trust in the medical profession who must care for individuals at all points in their journey," said Mrs Greenwood.

"Quality palliative and end of life care is best practice, and highly effective at providing choice and ensuring a peaceful end of life. Palliative care addresses the physical, psychological, spiritual, and social needs of an individual nearing end of life, and provides ongoing supports to the family surrounding them. Clinicians assist patients and their family in the progression of their condition to improve quality of life, relieve suffering, coordinate symptom relief, and provide support for their comfort and wellbeing until their natural death."

"Despite the proven benefits of quality palliative care, it remains chronically underfunded, and inaccessible to much of the Australian population, particularly those in rural and remote communities. The productivity commission estimates that 'many, perhaps tens of thousands of, people' cannot access desired support to die in their own home and die in hospital instead," said Mrs Greenwood.

"It is the belief of CHA that quality palliative care is the best and most effective way to provide choice and ease suffering at the end of life. All Western Australians should have access to affordable, high-quality and multi-disciplinary palliative and end of life care before any alternatives should be considered."

Catholic Health Australia represents Australia's largest non-government grouping of hospitals, aged and community care services, providing approximately 10 per cent of hospital and aged care services in Australia, including around 30 per cent of private hospital care as well as approximately 5 per cent of public hospital care.

In Western Australia, Catholic Health Australia member services provide 1,489 private hospital beds, 343 public hospital beds, 1,404 aged care beds across 28 aged care facilities and 1,735 home care packages.