



Knights of the Southern Cross (Qld) Inc

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24 February 2012

Submission to the Standing Committee
On Community Affairs
Regarding
PALLIATIVE CARE

Contact:
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State Secretary
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The Knights of the Southern Cross is a pro-life organization of Catholic men which strongly supports palliative care for all Australians as a matter of right demanded by the dignity of each human person.

We are all distressed by witnessing other human beings who are left to die alone and suffering agonizing deaths. Unfortunately, too often it seems to many that the preferred solution is euthanasia or assisted suicide, rather than palliative care.

Both euthanasia and assisted suicide are morally wrong and undermine the good of society and the dignity of human life. They are negative approaches which simply seek to provide an escape mechanism for problems considered too hard to handle, without regard to moral implications.

Conversely, palliative care is seen as a positive approach to the problem of dying with dignity which upholds the value of human life.

If palliative care is to be seen as viable, it needs to be made available to all Australians in need. Most of those involved with palliative care strongly argue this is currently far from the case.

According to the Australian Department on Health and Ageing, palliative care services are provided in the home, in community based settings like nursing homes, palliative care units, and in hospitals. Each has its proponents, strengths, and weaknesses. None is preferred to the exclusion of others, and all are in desperate need of increased funding.

As part of the health care system, palliative care is seen as not having kept pace with other aspects, in spite of increased hospital palliative care admissions. (One report suggests a 56% increase in the ten years ending in 2008-09).

At the same time, there are growing demands for palliative care outside of hospitals. One claimed benefit of such care is that it costs less to care for patients outside of hospitals.

Of the various methods of palliative care options, we think special attention needs to be given to at-home care, especially in outlying areas. What care is available tends to be concentrated in urban areas. Many Australians, including a number of our members, live away from the availability of organizational care providers. Additionally, according to Palliative Care Australia, a consumer survey it conducted showed that the majority of people wanted to be supported to die at home.

We also see a need for increased government funding for palliative care support in aged care facilities. Many of our members are also directly engaged in the operation of Southern Cross Care, an initiative of the Knights of the Southern Cross, which provides aged care and retirement facilities in Australia. We can see the acute need that exists in that sector.

Competing demands on limited resources means priorities will need to be established. It is beyond the scope of this submission to recommend a set of priorities, but it is clear that a massive commitment to increase support to palliative care will be needed. This need will only increase with the growing proportion of our ageing population.

We note that this inquiry is also considering advance health care planning. This is a topic which impacts upon all people, not just those needing palliative care. While we support the right of people to express their preferences for their future health care in advance, we do not believe that any change to the law should lessen the laws against euthanasia and assisted suicide.

This submission has been approved by the State Council (directors) of the Knights of the Southern Cross (Inc.) Queensland.