



? What is Palliative Care

The World Health Organisation defines it as follows:

- I. Palliative care is an approach that **improves the quality of life** of **patients** and their **families** facing the problem associated with **life-threatening illness**, through the prevention and relief of suffering by means of early identification and impeccable assessment and treatment of pain and other problems, physical, psychosocial and spiritual.

the definition continues

II. Palliative care:

- provides relief from pain and other distressing symptoms;
- affirms life and regards dying as a normal process;
- intends neither to hasten or postpone death;
- integrates the psychological and spiritual aspects of patient care;
- offers a support system to help patients live as actively as possible until death;
- offers a support system to help the family cope during the patients illness and in their own bereavement;
- uses a team approach to address the needs of patients and their families, including bereavement counselling, if indicated;
- will enhance quality of life, and may also positively influence the course of illness;
- is applicable early in the course of illness, in conjunction with other therapies that are intended to prolong life, such as chemotherapy or radiation therapy, and includes those investigations needed to better understand and manage distressing clinical complications.

(World Health Organisation. 2020)

? Is Palliative Care the same as Voluntary Assisted Dying

In Victoria, Voluntary Assisted Dying means that a doctor prescribes medication for a person to take by mouth, or in limited circumstances the doctor gives an injection, to end the person's life. This must be at the dying person's request, and because of their suffering.

You can see from the World Health Organisation definition that Palliative Care is not the same as Voluntary Assisted Dying. Palliative Care does not aim to cause death. It aims to improve the person's quality of life but accepts when death is inevitable. Interestingly, there are studies that show Palliative Care can sometimes help a person to live longer.

When medical treatment is ceased or withheld because it is no longer effective, or because the patient does not want to have that treatment, this is not Voluntary Assisted Dying nor euthanasia.

Sometimes a patient will choose to receive both Palliative Care and Voluntary Assisted Dying.

Further information can be accessed from the Better Health Channel
<https://www.betterhealth.vic.gov.au/>