

# 40 STORIES IN 40 YEARS

## Margaret Box



As a former CEO of Palliative Care Victoria (PCV), Margaret Box has made an extraordinary impact on the sector.

It was a strong interest in helping people and a passion for making a meaningful difference that drew her towards a career in palliative care.

Margaret commenced as the CEO of PCV in 1997, after first being introduced through her work in intellectual disabilities.

“I’ve always been passionate about helping and caring for people. I had a number of friends pass away when I was younger that gave me a different awareness of death, and ultimately led me to an interest in services that would help people have a good death, like palliative care.”

***“I believe it’s critical to be able to support someone who is diagnosed with a life-ending illness. Our support can impact the individual and their families in such a positive way.”***

Margaret dedicated eight years to PCV. While there, she witnessed substantial industry growth, and was involved in incredible initiatives and programs that helped the sector progress to where it is today.

“I had previously worked quite hands on in intellectual disability as well and had been a CEO at a peak body in the industry, so I had a good amount of experience coming into the PCV role – particularly around how to work with people who had a label on them.”

For Margaret, some of the key changes that were made were across accessibility and understanding of palliative care and around funding the services.

“When I first started with PCV, the concept of palliative care was not new. In fact, PCV had been around since the mid 80’s, just under a different name. However, community knowledge of palliative care really evolved across the eight years that I was at PCV.”

“Over time, it has grown beyond a service that just cares for the elderly and people who are near to death. There are services for children, and there is a more holistic and integrated approach across the board.”

***“The value of palliative care is having that physical, emotional, and mental support. It is invaluable, and this level of care cannot be measured.”***

“Service offerings have expanded and there’s a greater emphasis on all aspects of a dying person’s life and support services for families that I think has made an immense difference in the way people view end of life.”

“There is also a wider acceptance of palliative care, and peak bodies like PCV play a pivotal role in that. I think that having the ability to coordinate across the sector and having one united voice is critically important, rather than having small organisations go in and advocate to government on their own behalf.”

“Across the years, it has been fantastic to see a vast increase in funding from both sides of the spectrum because more funding equals more training and support, that is integral in increasing widespread access.”

However, she believes that there is still a long way to go before palliative care is fully and genuinely recognised for what it really is.

“There are still many debates about end-of-life care. I think we need to embrace the assistance of dying as part of the overall philosophy of palliative care. Today, euthanasia is still considered as a controversial topic but health workers were asked about voluntary assisted dying on a daily basis.

“Moving into the next 40 years, I would like to see more discussions around this because as individuals we have a right to know and make informed choices at every stage of our lives.”

***“The recognition of the role of allied health and volunteers in palliative care by peak organisations such as PCV contributes to policy development and education for communities.”***

There have been many highlights in Margaret’s career, especially from her time working at Palliative Care Victoria.

“As the CEO of PCV, I was involved in many initiatives and programs that are memorable.”

“One particular highlight was the development of the multicultural guidelines with my late colleague, Andrew Taylor, Executive Director from Palliative Care South Australia. We had a

unique and well-suited partnership whereby he worked hard on promotional materials and flyers, and I supported the project with funding, editorial, content and other supports. We were able to expand and develop guidelines in 20 languages, that we handed over to the national organisation. It also obtained global reach.”

“Another highlight was the development of the *about...* series of leaflets and booklet. These were researched by our volunteer researcher, Dr. Roslyn Glow. They provided information to patients, carers and providers about various aspects of palliative care services and delivery. The leaflets were, likewise, made available to other states and territories for their use with appropriate acknowledgement. This series became extremely popular and helped take away some of the ‘mystery’ of palliative care.”

Margaret moved on from PCV in 2005, but she continues to help others in need and give back to the community where she can. After moving to Thailand with her husband in 2005, she helped re-write the health section of the Bangkok Health Guide, which involved acquiring information and contact details of healthcare professionals, doctors and their services: invaluable for expatriates. She also worked closely with general practitioners who were wanting to promote palliative care in the country.

“The most valuable advice I always take with me is to treat others as you would like to be treated – this will assist you to be at peace with yourself and, most importantly, helps other have a better life too.”