

Odette Waanders



Odette's passion for improving people's lives motivated her to work as the CEO of Palliative Care Victoria from 2010 to 2019.

"A close relationship with my grandmother influenced my appreciation of the unique value of each person and the importance of quality of life until the end of life. My grandmother inspired me to focus on improving the quality of life of older people."

Odette pursued this goal working with government, peak body and community organisations in Australia and New Zealand. Her experiences in policy, advocacy, communication, and management were a good fit for the work at PCV.

"Palliative care resonated with me for many reasons. I was devastated when I was not allowed to visit my grandmother while she was dying. That was not unusual back then but decades on we are still poorly prepared for the experiences of grief, dying and death.

"Palliative care opens up the conversation about dying, death and grief - such integral and universal experiences of life. Palliative care promotes the quality of life right up until we die and while we grieve.

"Palliative care values, respects and cares for the each person's physical, emotional, cultural and spiritual needs. It also supports families through their caring and grieving experiences."

Reflecting on her experienced working with PCV, Odette highlights the small but very dedicated and talented PCV team passionate about making a difference. They work very hard helping many people to access the services and support they need, collaborating with varied groups to strengthen cultural responsiveness and volunteering, as well as servicing PCV members.

“The palliative care sector provided invaluable information and support for many of PCV’s projects and its advocacy to improve access to palliative care.

“PCV also has very rich and valued relationships with indigenous and diverse cultural and faith groups that enhance culturally accessible and responsive palliative care, as well as strengthening community capacity to deal with death, dying, grief and loss.

Odette says that people with life limiting illness and their carers were a continuing source of inspiration and admiration. “They made our work very meaningful and memorable. Their stories helped break down fears and increase understanding of palliative care. Their generosity in sharing their experiences has a lasting impact.”

Some of these personal stories were featured in the *Moments That Matter* campaign in 2019.

“Through short videos, they shared the things that palliative care was able to give them – such as love, family, joy, freedom– and it was wonderful to hear how much it improved their quality of life.”

“Palliative care is an important part of our life and a core part of what we need for our health and well-being as we approach the end of life.”

Odette considers that the most impactful advancements during her time at PCV were improved access to palliative care and a greater focus on improving community engagement and awareness around death, dying, grief and loss. However, she highlights the imperative to increase investment to keep pace with increasing need and to further build community awareness and capacity in this area of life.

“Palliative care should be an integral part of healthcare and aged care and this must be made possible by the requisite education of health and care professionals.”

“We also need to build the capacity of the community and support carers when faced with life limiting illness, dying, death and loss. Strengthening collaboration and communication with the various sectors who support people of all ages, abilities and cultures as they experience chronic or life limiting illness will be invaluable.”

Reflecting on the role of PCV as a peak body, Odette says, “PCV has an important role to play as a change agent in a healthy democracy. Advocacy keeps a focus on addressing inequity and improving quality of life, particularly for people who are in vulnerable situations.”

“Palliative care is what humanity is about. It demonstrates how much we value and care about each person until they take their last breath.”

For Odette, it is vital that the core ‘holistic approach’ to palliative care strengthens and does not wane over the next 40 years. She believes it offers a desirable model for effective person-centred health and care services rather than an increasingly fragmented system.

“In a world of technology and advanced medicine, it is also important to retain an holistic focus on the unique physical, emotional , spiritual and cultural needs of each person.”

