

Rural and remote Queenslanders will have their dying wish

Doctors' calls for country Queenslanders to be able to live their final days at home have been answered with a \$17 million injection into community-based palliative care services in Tuesday's State Budget.

Australian Medical Association (AMA) Queensland President Dr Dilip Dhupelia said the funding was recognition of a long-standing need in rural and remote areas.

"Sadly, there has been a significant unmet need for palliative care services in Queensland for many years and it's been exacerbated by the ageing population," Dr Dhupelia said.

"Rural and remote areas are hit hardest with historic poor resourcing, lack of staffing and limited understanding amongst Queenslanders of the value of quality palliative care.

"AMA Queensland has advocated strongly for the right of people to die with dignity and minimal suffering and this palliative care funding injection is a giant leap in the right direction."

Dr Dhupelia said a new \$80 million *Healthy Ageing: A Strategy for Older Queenslanders* also funds public education about Advance Care Planning, which AMA Queensland has been advocating for some time.

"AMA Queensland launched the *Fifty over Fifty* campaign earlier this year to encourage people to tackle the taboo topics of dying and death with their loved ones and GP," he said.

"The campaign aims to have 50 per cent of all Queenslanders aged over 50 establish an Advanced Care Plan (ACP) by 2020."

Dr Dhupelia said while 70 per cent of Australians wanted to die at home, only about 14 per cent were able toⁱ because they did not have an ACP, which is also called an Advanced Health Directive or living will.

"If your family and GP don't know your wishes for end-of-life care, this can add a lot of extra pressure at a time when loved ones are trying to make difficult decisions on your behalf," he said.

"We applaud the State Government for bringing this important issue to light and urge Queenslanders to start having conversations with their family and loved ones about how they would like to be cared for when the time comes."

Dr Dhupelia called on the State Government to establish a registry for ACPs to ensure the documents were legally binding and could be accessed by all doctors.

"AMA Queensland would also like to see a set of guidelines developed on when clinicians should discuss Advance Care Planning with their patients," he said.

"More end-of-life care is being delivered in communities and at home, so it's vital we develop a strong framework to support and protect doctors and their patients."

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ⁱ Swerissen, H and Ducktt, S., 2014, Dying Well. Grattan Institute