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Queenslanders urged to write their own ending

Doctors are urging more than 1.5 million Queenslanders aged over 50 to take control of the rest of their lives and write down how they want to die.

While 70 per cent of people say they would prefer to die at home, surrounded by family and friends, more than 80 per cent of Queenslanders actually spend their final days in a hospital or nursing home.ⁱ

AMA Queensland President Dr Chris Zappala said the disconnect was largely because death remained one of society's last taboos.

"Many patients don't like to think about death and some certainly don't want to talk about it," said Dr Zappala.

"But it's inevitable, so we need to be up front about how we want to be cared for as we approach death – no matter how uncomfortable it makes us."

He encouraged all Queenslanders over the age of 50 to talk to their GP about how they want to be treated and cared for at the end of their life, a process known as advanced care planning.

"Think of it as a Will for your health," he said. "Advanced care planning gives you control when you can't speak for yourself."

"It can prevent a lot of heartache, when your family may be too distressed to make difficult decisions, and medical staff will respect your wishes if they know what they are."

Dr Zappala said AMA Queensland was kick-starting the conversation with a social media campaign featuring Queensland doctors and their patients.

The videos include Oakey GP Dr John Hall with 99-year-old Merle McCoist and her daughter Dianne Reed, as well as Townsville palliative medicine specialist Dr Will Cairns and Brisbane GP Dr Richard Kidd.

Dr Hall said it was important to understand that end of life care did not mean less care.

"It often means more care but in a very different way," Dr Hall said.

"Oakey was a trial site for the State Government's End of Life Care Pathway, so I've seen the benefits of good advanced care planning."

"Patients at Oakey Hospital's aged care facility are nearing the end of their life and won't necessarily benefit from intensive treatments and therapies, so the End of Life Pathway gives them a chance to decide what tests or treatments they receive, and if they are resuscitated after a heart attack or stroke."

AMA Queensland has also released a discussion paper on End of Life Care, as Part 5 of its *Health Vision* series.

"With more funding for palliative care and a humane, compassionate approach, Queensland could lead the nation in end-of-life care," Dr Zappala said.

AMA Queensland’s *Health Vision 5* recommendations to Government include:

- **Review Queensland’s palliative care needs** to ensure funding targets areas in need.
- **Increase funding** to ensure palliative care services are available to all Queenslanders.
- **Set up fully resourced specialist palliative care units** in each region.
- **Open a Queensland Medical Education and Training Institute (QMETI)** to provide specialist palliative care and palliative medicine training.

“No one deserves a lingering, impersonal, or lonely death,” Dr Zappala said.

“Through advanced care planning and adequate palliative care, we can help everyone feel empowered when they shuffle off this mortal coil.”

To read *Health Vision 5* and see the *AMA Queensland End of Life Care campaign*, go to http://www.amaq.com.au/page/Advocacy/AMA_Queenslands_Health_Vision/part-five-care-atthe-end-of-life/

Queensland’s over 50 population

Age group (years)							
50–54	55–59	60–64	65–69	70–74	75–79	80–84	85 and over
313,727	287,534	255,616	231,441	171,411	119,904	81,432	82,026

Source: ABS 3235.0 Population by Age and Sex, Regions of Australia 2015

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ⁱ Swerissen, H and Duckett, S (Grattan Institute). 2014. Dying Well.