

Hon Martin Aldridge MLC

Member for the Agricultural Region

19 December 2019

Hon Matthew Swinbourn MLC
Chair
Standing Committee on Environment and Public Affairs

Via email: env@parliament.wa.gov.au

Dear Mr Swinbourn

RE: PETITION No. 143 – PALLIATIVE CARE IN REGIONAL WA

I refer to your letter received by my office on 5 December and would like to thank you for the opportunity to provide a written submission in support of the petition. I confirm that I would like the Committee to inquire into the matters raised in the petition as it is important that West Australians in regional and remote areas can access better palliative care services close to their home and families.

The petition requested the Legislative Council call on Premier Mark McGowan and the Minister for Health to:

- Ensure funding for Palliative Care services are in line with requirements and expectations of the health sector and regional communities;
- Work with the Department of Health, WA Country Health Service and private health sector practitioners to increase staffing levels, improve administration of patient care and provide greater access and availability to palliative care specialists in the regions; and
- Introduce a broader and adaptive model of aftercare support for the families of palliative care patients who lose their loved ones.

Palliative Care services are limited in regional WA and the uncertainty continues as to how the recent funding announcements will be beneficial to the regions. There has been a call from Palliative Care specialists for more funding to address the needs and staffing requirement in regional areas. It is important for the needs in regional and remote areas to be assessed, to identify how people in regional WA can be better catered for in their end of life choices.



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It has been identified that there is huge disparity from Metropolitan services to services in regional WA, and also from region to region. A study conducted by the WA Palliative Medicine Specialists Group found 73% of people living in the Agricultural and Mining and Pastoral regions believed palliative care should be improved before the introduction of voluntary assisted dying legislation, noting that legislation has now passed however implementation is not likely until mid-2021.

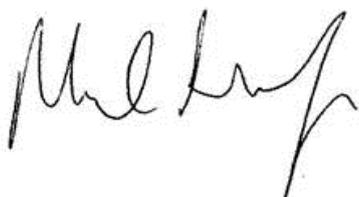
There are innovative models that have proven to work well in regional WA, one is the Wheatbelt tele-palliative care pilot program. An innovative project created by a local clinical nurse manager and 2018 nurse of the year. The service was able to significantly increase the percentage of patients able to be supported to die at home. It allowed staff to talk to patients face to face and support carers and families without having to drive long distances, which was found to be effective in many circumstances.

I am aware that the Government intends to move a motion in February 2020 to form a Joint Select Committee into palliative care in Western Australia with delivery of palliative care into regional and remote areas being one of the focuses. I look forward to seeing this progress and the outcomes, however I respectfully submit to the committee that the objective of the petition is much broader than the intention of the government to establish an inquiry.

The government has recently announced two tranches of new investment into palliative care which as more detail is known an assessment of its value and efficacy will be important, but more so what is required now and into the future in terms of design and funding to deliver appropriate services across Western Australia.

The recent debate on the *Voluntary Assisted Dying Bill 2019* has entrenched as a principle that every West Australian should have equitable access to the scheme. It then follows that if West Australians are to truly have 'end of life choice' then access to support and care including palliative care are essential elements that require closer scrutiny by the committee in my view and the view of the 595 petitioners.

Yours sincerely

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Martin Aldridge', written in a cursive style.

HON MARTIN ALDRIDGE MLC
Member for the Agricultural Region