



UNDER EMBARGO—until 1.00am, Wednesday, 22 May 2019

Palliative care-related hospitalisations growing faster than other hospital services

Palliative care-related hospitalisations has been rising at a faster rate than other hospitalisations, according to a report released by the Australian Institute of Health and Welfare (AIHW).

Palliative care aims to improve the quality of life of patients and their families facing life-limiting illness, through the prevention and relief of suffering.

The report, *Palliative care services in Australia*, shows that between 2012-13 and 2016-17, palliative care-related hospitalisations rose by over 25% from almost 62,000 to over 77,000. This is greater than the 18% increase recorded for all hospitalisations over the same period.

‘Although it’s difficult to be definitive about the reasons for this rise, Australia’s growing and ageing population—paired with a rise in chronic and incurable illnesses—has led to an increased need for palliative care,’ said AIHW spokesperson Matthew James

As in previous years, patients aged 75 years and over accounted for over half (53%) of palliative care-related hospitalisations, while 1 in 10 were patients aged under 55 years. The average age of patients was 73, with little differences between the sexes.

‘Over half of all palliative care-related hospitalisations ended with the patient’s death (52%), compared with less than 1 in one hundred (0.7%) for all hospitalisations,’ said Mr James

The report also shows that almost half (46.7%) of palliative care-related hospitalisations were for patients with cancer. For certain types of cancer, palliative care played a particularly prominent role in patients’ hospital care.

‘For example, almost one-third of all hospitalisations related to pancreatic cancer were palliative care-related,’ Mr James said

‘At the core of palliative care is the aim to provide relief from pain and other distressing symptoms, and medication can be central to this,’

Nationally, there were more than 1.1 million palliative care-related prescriptions provided to almost 551,000 patients in 2017-18.

Anti-inflammatory and anti-rheumatic medications were the most commonly prescribed medication type (54%), followed by analgesics (35%), and laxatives (7%).

This week is National Palliative Care Week, and one of the key messages is the need for Australians to plan ahead for their end-of-life care, and discuss it with their loved ones and health professionals.

‘Today’s report shows us that more people being admitted to hospital are requiring palliative care services, but we don’t know how many of these people would preferred to have received palliative care elsewhere,’ Mr James said.

Canberra, distribution date

Further information: Peter Jean, AIHW: Tel. 02 6244 1148, mob. 0401 312 261

For embargoed media copies of the report: media@aihw.gov.au

