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Media Release

True choice at end of life must include excellent palliative care

Palliative Care Queensland CEO Shyla Mills has urged Queensland Members of Parliament to not forget about palliative care as they consider voluntary assisted dying (VAD) laws and to ensure that there is massively increased funding to ensure Queenslanders have a true choice with access to proper care in their last days, weeks, months and years and for their loved ones when they are bereaved.

Ms Mills said Palliative Care Queensland, the peak body for the sector, did not advocate for or against VAD but said it was vitally important that access to excellent quality palliative care was available to all people from the time of their diagnosis with a terminal illness, through to bereavement support for their loved ones. “Sadly, palliative care has historically been poorly funded and while we have welcomed the Premier’s election commitment of an extra \$171 million over six years, it’s only an extra \$28 million a year and we don’t think that it will make much difference to most Queenslanders in terms of better quality of care or greater access to quality care when and where they need it, especially for First Nation Queenslanders and people living in rural and remote regions,” Ms Mills said. “Access to palliative care is very much a lottery in Queensland depending on where you live and your postcode – especially when most people say they want to die at home when they get a terminal diagnosis.”

PCQ worked with the sector and AMA Queensland to come up with a funding model for palliative care which was released in 2020. This calls for an additional \$275million per year investment in palliative care to reach World Health Organisation standards and provide equal access to all terminally ill people in Queensland.

The Government response was the election announcement of \$28 million per year for palliative care, which leaves a **shortfall of \$247million per year**.

Ms Mills said it was encouraging to see that the Queensland Law Reform Commission had drafted laws on an important underlying principle that “every person approaching the end of life should be provided with high quality care and treatment, including palliative care, to minimise the person’s suffering and maximise the person’s quality of life.”

“We agree with that principle 100% and that’s exactly what we’re trying to achieve for all Queenslanders,” she said. “But unfortunately, that principle **can’t** and **won’t** be achieved without adding another \$247 million a year to the current funding commitment and currently the Queensland Government’s palliative care annual budget is around half a percent (\$110million a year) of the total Queensland Health budget (approximately \$22 billion). “PCQ is neutral on the issue of VAD. But we believe in **true choice**. When people say VAD creates a choice for people at the end of life, we believe that without appropriately funding palliative care services throughout Queensland, there really isn’t a true choice,” said Ms Mills.

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About Palliative Care Queensland

Palliative Care Queensland (PCQ) is a leading charity and independent peak body representing palliative care providers, consumers and their families and those with an interest in palliative care in Queensland.

PCQ was established in 1988 and is a membership-based organisation, supporting the individuals, families, carers, community members, as well as specialist and generalist health care professionals working with Queenslanders experiencing serious illness, dying, death and grief. Collectively, the PCQ membership body holds tremendous knowledge and wisdom about the challenges the sector faces and the opportunities those challenges can bring. PCQ is a founding member of Palliative Care Australia.

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