

Disaster Support

In the Townsville area many people have experienced living through a disaster. (For example: floods, cyclones, fires, COVID-19 pandemic.) These disasters have an impact on us during normal life but what happens when the disaster occurs when you are caring for a loved one (or are yourself) experiencing serious illness, dying, death and grief?

Background

Palliative Care Queensland, Northern Queensland Primary Health Network and Townsville Hospital and Health Service, as well as the mayors across the Townsville Area and the Townsville Aboriginal and Islander Health Service, all endorsed the Townsville Area Palliative Care Plan which includes Direction 9: Disaster Planning, Response and Recovery.

In 2022 Palliative Care Queensland completed a consultation with community members as well as health professionals and council stakeholders. The aim of the consultation was to understand the current supports in place, community needs, and opportunities within the health, social and community systems to ensure that people experiencing a serious illness, dying, death or grief during a disaster are supported.

This factsheet provides basic information which was identified throughout the consultation as useful for community members to consider in relation to preparing, responding to, and recovering from a disaster.

Preparing for a disaster

- **Check your Neighbours**
 - All Councils have disaster management plans and resources on their websites. A particularly useful tool in relation to people living with a serious illness, dying or grief is the Queensland Government “Check your Neighbours” factsheet which can be downloaded at the link below:
 - https://os-data-2.s3-ap-southeast-2.amazonaws.com/hsc/bundle190/06_check-your-neighbours.pdf
 - Prepare what critical items you will need
 - Work with your health team to create an anticipatory care plan and ensure you have the resources available – including medications, supplies and equipment. Prepare with training.
 - Work with the health team to be trained in the use of equipment, medications for symptom management, and in providing personal hygiene and comfort, as health professionals may not be available.
- **Prepare for conversations**
 - Consider learning about how to have conversations with those experiencing a serious illness, dying, death and grief. Consider the Pallilearn courses.
- **Prepare your community**
 - Ensure community members are aware of and educated in how to care for people who have a serious illness, dying, death or grief. While this is always important, it is particularly important during a disaster as health professionals may not be available.

Responding to a disaster

During a disaster resources are often scarce. The key principles of palliative care need to continue during a disaster and can be summarised as follows:

- Ensure that care for people experiencing a serious illness, dying, death and grief is available
- Focus on the relief of suffering
- Consider stockpiling critical medications
- Keep a line of communication open to provide palliative care guidance via phone or other tools eg. internet
- If possible, take palliative care supports to the person, rather than expecting the patient to travel to a care setting
- Support and educate the carer and people around the patient to provide palliative care
- Consider privacy, comfort, and ambience
- Consider spiritual and emotional care
- All patients must be treated with dignity and compassion
- Designate volunteers to support people experiencing a serious illness, dying, death and grief
- Be the voice to ensure that care continues for people experiencing a serious illness, dying, death or grief
- Consider “Compassionate Exemptions” during disaster directions, to ensure that people stay connected, but safe during a disaster

Recovering from a disaster

- Identify community members who are experiencing a serious illness, dying, death or grief and offer support
- Encourage kindness and compassion for those grieving
- Offer additional supports for those experiencing a serious illness, dying, death or grief during a disaster
- Take time to reflect on, and talk about, the experience
- Encourage community members to both ask for help or offer help

Other useful resources

- **Person Centred Emergency Preparedness Workbook (P-CEP)**
 - collaborating4inclusion.org
- **Palliative Caring booklet**
 - palliativecareqld.org.au
- **PalliLearn public education**
 - palliativecareqld.org.au/pallilearn
- **Carer Gateway: Emergency care plan**
 - carergateway.gov.au

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