



Holistic End of Life &
Death Care Australia

27 October 2024

To: The Australian Government Department of Health and Aged Care

Subject: Public Consultation on the Aged Care Act – Inclusion of End-of-Life Support and Recognition of End-of-Life Doulas as Service Providers

From: The Chair and Vice Chair of Holistic End of Life and Death Care Australia (HELD - www.held.org.au)

Dear Consultation Team,

On behalf of HELD Australia, we welcome the opportunity to provide input into the ongoing public consultation regarding reforms to the Aged Care Act. We commend the Government's commitment to reforming the aged care system and ensuring that it meets the diverse and evolving needs of older Australians.

As an organisation deeply committed to ensuring holistic support at the end of life, we would like to respectfully propose the inclusion of End-of-Life support as a core service within the Aged Care system. This support is essential not only to uphold the dignity and wishes of individuals as they approach the end of life, but also to ensure that their families and loved ones are supported during this challenging time.

1. The Case for End-of-Life Support in Aged Care

End-of-Life care is a critical component of aged care. As more Australians live longer, the number of older people requiring dedicated end-of-life support is growing. These individuals often face complex emotional, psychological, and practical challenges, which require sensitive and specialised care that extends beyond conventional medical treatment. Unfortunately, current aged care services are frequently focused on physical health, leaving gaps in the provision of emotional, spiritual, and non-medical end-of-life care.

We believe that the Aged Care Act should be expanded to include comprehensive End-of-Life support as part of the standard aged care service list. By doing so, Australia's aged care system can provide more integrated, compassionate, and person-centred care, addressing the needs of the whole person, rather than just their clinical conditions.

2. The Role of End-of-Life Doulas

We also strongly advocate for the recognition of End-of-Life Doulas (EOLDs) as essential service providers within the aged care system. End-of-Life Doulas provide non-medical, holistic support to individuals and families as they navigate the end-of-life journey. Their services complement the roles of medical and aged care professionals, offering emotional support, practical assistance, and guidance tailored to the individual's and family's unique needs and wishes.

End-of-Life Doulas play a pivotal role in improving the quality of end-of-life care by:

1. Facilitating discussions about end-of-life preferences, including advance care directives and legacy planning.
2. Offering emotional and psychological support to individuals and their families, helping them navigate grief, anxiety, and the emotional complexity of the end-of-life experience.
3. Ensuring that the dying individual's values and wishes are honoured, which leads to greater dignity and comfort in their final days.
4. Assisting in creating peaceful, meaningful end-of-life experiences, often in collaboration with other healthcare and aged care providers.

By formally recognising End-of-Life Doulas as part of the aged care workforce, the Government can help ensure that older Australians receive the personalised and compassionate care they deserve at the end of life. EOLDs work in collaboration with other health professionals, including palliative care teams, aged care providers, and carers, and their inclusion will enhance the overall quality of care delivered within the system.

Specifically, Australia's aged care sector faces a significant and growing workforce shortage, with projections indicating a need for an additional 17,000 workers annually to maintain essential standards. Staff shortages are particularly challenging in end-of-life care, where many aged care workers feel unprepared and, at times, uncomfortable supporting those nearing the end of life. This contributes to high turnover rates as staff often leave roles that include end-of-life responsibilities.

The inclusion of End-of-Life Doulas as part of the care team would address this gap by providing specialised support at the end of life, relieving existing staff to focus on their core caring roles and reducing the emotional burden that often contributes to workforce attrition. This approach would enhance staff retention and ensure that individuals and their families receive compassionate, professional support at this critical stage.

3. Recommendations for the Aged Care Act

Considering the above, we respectfully request the following:

1. The inclusion of "End-of-Life support" as a core service within the aged care system, recognising the importance of comprehensive, compassionate care for individuals and their families during the end-of-life period.
2. The formal recognition of End-of-Life Doulas as non-medical service providers within the aged care workforce, allowing for collaboration with healthcare professionals and enhancing the quality of person-centred care.
3. Training and awareness programs for aged care staff on the role and benefits of End-of-Life Doulas to foster greater understanding and integration of holistic end-of-life care across the aged care system.

Conclusion

The inclusion of End-of-Life support in the service list of the Aged Care Act, alongside the recognition of End-of-Life Doulas, represents a vital step in addressing the full spectrum of care needs for older Australians. This approach not only aligns with the values of dignity, compassion, and respect but also helps ensure that individuals and their families are supported during one of the most profound phases of life.

We appreciate the opportunity to contribute to this important consultation and would welcome any further discussion on how End-of-Life support and the role of End-of-Life Doulas can be effectively integrated into the future of aged care in Australia.

Your sincerely,

Helen Callanan

Chair, HELD Australia

Shannon Beresford

Vice Chair, HELD Australia



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