

POLICY FUTURES

A Reform Agenda



Reimagining Death Care for Our Ageing Population

As many as 70% of Australians want to die at home and yet comparatively few achieve that. Overwhelmingly, people are not achieving the end of life they desire. A system that provides both informal supports, such as non-medical based services that focus on social, spiritual wellbeing, as well as formal supports, such as medical services, is needed.

The significant benefits of community-centred and family-focused approaches to both the care of the dying and the dead, and the integration of these with existing healthcare approaches can be clearly seen in countries that have implemented them. To realise similar benefits, Australia needs to start a discussion to develop strategies for the integration of informal and formal supports and services in end of life and death care. A national interdisciplinary roundtable needs to be convened to develop strategies that provide wider options and greater support for the growing numbers of people predicted to die in the next four decades.

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Key Policy Recommendations

It is recommended that the Commonwealth Department of Health and Ageing engage the Primary Health Network to establish and facilitate a national interdisciplinary roundtable to develop strategies for the integration of formal and informal supports and services at end of life and in death care. Both formal and informal service providers should be represented. This roundtable should be tasked to formulate an integrated model of service delivery for end of life and after death care, that includes:

- 1 Investigating the infrastructure needed to adequately support people to die at home, that is, hospice at home services and end of life doula support.
- 2 Developing the resources and education programs required to support families and communities who choose community and family led home funeral and after death care.
- 3 Formulating strategies to promote the inclusion of end of life doula services as part of aged care and National Disability Insurance Scheme (NDIS) packages.
- 4 Expanding the scope of existing death literacy and advance care planning programs and services to include the non-medical supports for end of life care, such as end of life doulas and the options of home death care and home funerals.

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Mortality projections

Australia's death rate is predicted to increase by more than

165%

over the next 40 years

By 2066, it is estimated there will be more than 430,000 deaths per year, compared to about 163,300 deaths registered in 2020.ⁱ



Why it matters

 **70%**

of Australians say they want to die at home ...

 **14%**

... but only about 14% of people achieve that.ⁱⁱ



What are we doing about it?

At present, there is no public policy that addresses the integration of formal and informal approaches to end of life and death care.

ⁱ Our numbers of dead are steadily increasing. According to the Australian Bureau of Statistics, Australia's population is projected to reach between 37.4 and 49.2 million people by 2066. According to the Australian Institute for Health and Welfare (AIHW), there were 169,300 deaths registered in 2020 (AIHW, 'Deaths in Australia', Accessed 19 February 2022. <https://www.aihw.gov.au/reports/life-expectancy-death/deaths-in-australia/contents/summary>). According to the United Nations (UN), the Australian death rate will reach 8.7 per 1000 head of population by 2066 (UN, 'World Population Prospects - 2022.' <https://population.un.org/wpp/Download/Probabilistic/Mortality/>). Based on the ABS' projected population of 49.2 million, that results in over 430,000 deaths that year. ⁱⁱ Australian Bureau of Statistics (ABS), 'Deaths, Australia.' Accessed 19 February 2022. <https://www.abs.gov.au/statistics/people/population/deathsaustralia/latest-release>; and United Nations, 'UN World Population Prospects'. UN, Department of Economic and Social Affairs, Accessed 19 February 2022. <https://population.un.org/wpp/Download/Probabilistic/Mortality/>