

## **Written evidence submitted by the Department of Health and Social Care (ADY0398)**

### **Summary**

The Government's position remains that any change to the law in relation to assisted dying is a matter for Parliament to decide and an issue of conscience for individual Parliamentarians rather than one for Government policy.

This response addresses only the questions about palliative care.

The UK provides, by international standards, very high-quality palliative and end of life care. Developments, including the addition of palliative care services to the list of services an Integrated Care Board must commission as part of the Health and Care Act 2022, will further promote consistency in quality of, and access to, care across England.

Resources have been, and are continuing to be, developed to help improve palliative care, including guidance by the National Institute for Health and Care Excellence which sets out best practice for commissioners and service providers, statutory guidance from NHS England on palliative care provision and the Universal Principles for Advanced Care Planning which support discussions between individuals and their care providers about their preferences and priorities for their future. Additionally, a new Policy Research Unit in Palliative and End of Life Care has been commissioned by the Department of Health and Social Care, through the National Institute for Health and Care Research (NIHR).

### **Palliative Care in England**

The Government is committed to ensuring high quality, personalised palliative and end of life care, ensuring that patients at end of life are treated with dignity. We recognise that high quality palliative and end of life care should include the opportunity for individuals to discuss their wishes and preferences so that these can be taken fully into account in the provision of their future care.

In 2021, the Journal of Pain and Symptom Management published research looking at [Cross Country Comparison of Expert Assessments of the Quality of Death and Dying](#) with the UK receiving the highest assessment score out of 81 countries.

The National Audit of Care at the End of Life ([NACEL](#)) is a national comparative audit of the quality and outcomes of care experienced by a dying person and those important to them during the last admission leading to death in acute hospitals, community hospitals and mental health inpatient providers in England, Wales and Northern Ireland. 2019 key findings include: 94% of patients discussed their individualised plan of care or a reason why this didn't happen is recorded, 99% of hospitals have access to a specialist palliative care team and 80% of families/carers felt the quality of care provided to the patient was good, excellent, or outstanding.

Through the Health and Care Act 2022 we have added palliative care services to the list of services an Integrated Care Board (ICB) must commission, promoting a more consistent national approach and supporting commissioners in prioritising palliative and end of life care. As part of this work, NHS England issued [statutory guidance for ICBs](#) regarding palliative and end of life care.

NHS England (NHSE) set up a system of Palliative and End of Life Care Strategic Clinical Networks (SCN) in September 2020, which will reduce local variation and act as engines for change across boundaries of commissioning and provision.

We recognise there is variation in how ICBs and Local Authorities commission hospice services, as well as variation in funding models. Whilst much palliative and end of life care is provided by NHS staff and services, including NHS hospices and community and hospital specialist palliative care, hospices also provide significant support to people at end of life and their families. As most hospices are charitable, independent organisations who receive some statutory funding for providing NHS services the levers that commissioners have can be limited.

Access to appropriate services is one of the key areas of focus set out in NHSE's delivery plan for palliative and end of life care, with inequity of access identified as a factor driving health inequality.

The National Institute for Health and Care Excellence (NICE) sets out guidance for end of life care for adults<sup>1</sup> which includes recommendations on out of hours care and better identification of people who may be approaching the end of life. NICE guidelines are based on best practice in developing and delivering care, and although they are not mandatory there is an expectation that commissioners and service providers take the guidelines into account when making decisions about how to best meet the needs of their local communities.

Advance care planning (ACP) is a voluntary process of person-centred discussion between an individual and their care providers about their preferences and priorities for their future care. Acknowledging the importance of ACP in improving access to palliative and end of life care services the Universal Principles for ACP was published by a coalition of partners in 2022. These principles will support individuals and those important to them, as well as practitioners and organisations who provide care, to have ACP conversations and ensure that the outcomes of the discussions are appropriately considered in future care provision.

In order to meet the policy research needs for palliative and end of life care, the Department of Health and Social Care through the National Institute for Health and Care Research (NIHR), is commissioning a new [Policy Research Unit \(PRU\) in Palliative and End of Life Care](#). This PRU will focus on how best policy makers can respond to a range of issues across palliative and end of life care, including key issues that emerged during the pandemic such as quality of care and inequalities in access to services in different settings. It will also include research into understanding the barriers to discussing palliative and end of life care and the wider role of society in supporting people who are dying and those important to them.

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<sup>1</sup> [Recommendations | End of life care for adults: service delivery | Guidance | NICE](#)