## Frequently Asked Questions

**Who can call the Palliative Care After Hours Helpline?**
People receiving palliative care, their carers, parents/carers of paediatric patients and families. Health professionals seeking advice about symptom management for palliative care patients in their care or equipment advice can also call the Helpline.

Some palliative care providers have an after hours service for their registered patients. Patients, carers or family members should check with their palliative care service or GP for the availability of a locally provided service before calling the Palliative Care After Hours Helpline (Helpline).

**Will people have to pay for the phone call?**
There is no charge for the advice and support that is provided. The phone call is free from landlines, Telstra payphones and some mobile phones depending on the contract.

**What is the definition of ‘after hours’?**
The Helpline operates weekdays from 5pm – 9am (AEST), on weekends from 5pm Friday to 9am Monday, and on Public Holidays.

**Who answers the calls and what qualifications do they have?**
Calls are answered and managed by a registered nurse with training in palliative care who will provide advice and support for the patient’s symptoms and concerns using a palliative approach. If the issue is more complex, the call will be transferred to a specialist palliative care nurse. All nurses have registration with the Australian Health Practitioner Regulation Agency.

**Will the nurses on the Helpline have access to palliative care patients’ care plans?**
The nurses will not have access to a patient’s care plan but will support the patient in implementing the relevant aspects of the care being provided and align any further advice with that care. The nurses will also ask the caller for the details of their principal palliative care provider so that a summary of the call (event summary) can be provided to the patient’s principal palliative care provider.

**Will the Helpline replace the need to have a palliative care provider?**
No. The Helpline is designed to be complementary to palliative care services provided during the day, and other after hours palliative care arrangements. The Helpline will assist health professionals to enable patients to remain at home, if appropriate, and reduce disruption to the patient by providing information, support and advice for patients, their carers, parents/carers of paediatric patients and families, and health professionals during the after hours period.

**How will the patient’s palliative care provider know they have used the Helpline?**
The caller will be asked for details of their principal palliative care provider, who will be faxed a copy of the event summary within 24 hours. It is important that services ensure their details are accurate in the National Health Services Directory so that event summaries can be received.

**What information will be included in the event summary?**
The event summary will include the patient’s details, type of call (e.g. symptom management, information, psychosocial support, etc.) and the outcome (referred to ..., advice provided).

**Can the event summary be sent to more than one recipient?**
Currently the event summary can only be faxed to one recipient. As part of the service development, the need to send the event summary to multiple recipients and means of receiving this information will be assessed.
What if my Local Health District already has after hours palliative care arrangements?
There is no need for Local Health Districts to amend their current arrangements. The purpose of the Helpline is to expand access for people who are unable to access palliative care advice and support after hours.

Will the nurses prompt the patient to provide the ambulance with authorised plans?
Yes. The nurses will check if the patient has an ambulance authorised palliative care plan and will suggest using it with the ambulance service if relevant.

Will the nurse wait or call back to see if the advice worked or does the patient need to call back?
The nurse will provide the caller with care and management options for the patient and a plan of what to do if the first recommendations don’t work. This may include calling the Helpline back or going to a face to face service.

How is the quality and safety of the service managed?
There is a governance framework that applies to the delivery of the Helpline, the purpose of which is to manage the overall delivery and quality of the service and to implement best-practice care and continuous improvement. There is an Advisory Committee established to oversee the governance of the Helpline, and a Service Improvement and Development Committee which focuses on clinical outcomes, operational processes and service improvement.

How does the Palliative Care After Hours Helpline link to the NSW Paediatric Palliative Care Programme’s Medical On-call Support Service?
If a call is from a parent / carer or family member of a child under 18 years, the call will be managed by the nurses on the Helpline.

If the call is from a healthcare professional in relation to a child aged under 18 years, the caller will be referred to the NSW Paediatric Palliative Care Programme’s Medical On-Call Support Service.

Who will the Helpline refer people to?
Depending on the patient’s symptoms, the Helpline may refer callers to other service providers as appropriate where a need is identified that is outside the scope of the after hours service (such as an emergency department, a pharmacist, counselling services, or carers helpline). Callers not linked with any local palliative care services will be referred to their GP or treating specialist to discuss palliative care options.

Further enquiries
Please contact: [editable field Delete as required: Integrated Care Branch, Ministry of Health, PCCU@doh.health.nsw.gov.au or local service contact details]