Advocating for Palliative Care

Key messages, tips and resources

1. Objectives

This short paper provides key messages, tips and resources to support effective engagement with Members of the Victorian Parliament that will assist us to achieve the following objectives:

- All Victorian MPs understand and recognise the value of palliative care
- The Victorian Parliament provides for increased and ongoing investment in palliative care to address current unmet and growing community needs.

While our initial focus is on the 2016 Victorian Budget, we need to maintain effective engagement with Victorian MPs over the longer term as well.

2. Engagement with MPs

Local MPs are used to being approached by people living in their electorates on a range of personal and/or policy matters. They know that being responsive to the concerns of people in their electorate helps them to get re-elected, especially if their seat is marginal.

You can approach your local MP in a personal capacity as a citizen who has a strong interest and personal involvement in palliative care. You can also approach them as a representative of a palliative care service that provides services in that electorate, if you have the authority to do so.

a) Arrange to meet with your local MP

You can either phone or call into your MPs local electorate office and ask to make a time to meet with them to discuss palliative care.

The electoral officer may encourage you to put the matter in writing. If so, refer to the fact that they have received correspondence from PCV about palliative care and you are keen to discuss it with them from a local perspective.

The Victorian Parliament website enables you to search by name, electorate or party for information and contact details for all Victorian MPs. This includes a brief CV of the MP as well as the address and phone number for their local electorate office.

Find out how much time you can spend with the MP – it is likely to be short, so prepare and plan how to make best use of this time, as well as being responsive during the meeting.
b) **Be informed about your local MP**

As with any relationship, it helps to know about the person you will be meeting. Read their CV, visit their website or Facebook and search the internet for any recent media coverage to gain insights into their interests and activities.

c) **Establish rapport early in the meeting**

MPs will appreciate a respectful approach that shows you value them as a person and appreciate the important work they do and the busy lives they lead.

Initially, it can help to establish rapport by referring to points of connection, shared interests or relevant local activities they have been involved in.

d) **Assess what they know already**

*Personal experience* - you could ask if they have any personal experience of palliative care among their family or friends. If they do and are prepared to discuss it briefly, it helps to create a bridge and also to assess what they know about, and their level of support for, palliative care.

*Correspondence from PCV* - mention that as a member of PCV you are aware that they would have received correspondence from PCV seeking their support for increased investment in palliative care. You can then discuss it taking into account whether they are familiar with it or not.

*Active listening* will be important throughout – it helps you to assess where they are coming from, what is important to them and specific issues they may have. You want to leave the MP feeling that it has been a productive and valuable meeting for them.

*Check understanding of palliative care* - be alert to common misperceptions of palliative care, such as thinking it is limited to old people, cancer and the last days or weeks of life. Gently broaden their understanding through examples or discussion during the meeting.

e) **Engage their heart, head and hip pocket**

Effective engagement needs to connect with the heart, make sense and justify investment.

To support or convey your key messages, it is helpful to refer to actual case examples that illustrate the key messages - either positively (the benefits, what is working well) or negatively (the gaps, issues due to inadequate funding).

Your aim is to activate their support for PCV’s Call to Action.

*The heart*

Engaging the heart is important as emotions heighten memory and motivate action.

It’s a good idea to engage the heart early in the meeting; for example, by talking about a personal experience of palliative care they have had or by sharing a palliative care story. You could show the 4 minute video of Moira and George on your iPad (see resources section below).

Key messages:

A story is the most powerful way to communicate the benefits of palliative care:
• Palliative care promotes comfort, alleviates suffering and improves quality of life
• Palliative care improves support for families, helping them to continue caring
• Palliative care enables people to focus on what matters most to them.

**The mind – it makes sense!**

As MPs need to discern how best to use public funds for the common good, sound rational arguments need to be presented to show that this is a priority issue that requires government action and investment.

Support your case and credibility with very succinct reference to evidence.

Key messages:

• **The need for palliative care is increasing** due to growth in Victoria’s population, an ageing population and increasing incidence of chronic disease.

• **Home deaths are preferred but hospital deaths prevail**: Most Victorians (around 70%) would prefer to die at home, but over half die in hospital. Only one third of people who died in Victorian hospitals in 2013 received palliative care during the last admission resulting in their death.

• **Community palliative care reduces demand for hospital beds** (the Travis Report, 2015); however, community palliative care is struggling to meet demand (Palliative Care Audit Report, Victorian Auditor General, 2015)

**The hip pocket – there is a sound case for investment!**

Highlight how investment in palliative care will help the State Government to achieve a more sustainable health budget.

Key messages:

• The cost of palliative care services can be between 40% and 300% less expensive than care in an acute bed or intensive care bed

• International evidence shows that access to palliative care for people who are dying results in fewer hospital and emergency admissions, shorter lengths of stay and fewer non-beneficial treatments

• More expensive acute services are being used unnecessarily because of limited palliative care service capacity and poor access by people who would benefit from palliative care.

• Investment in palliative care translates into more effective use of health resources and improves the quality of life of thousands of Victorians.

If you can, cite actual examples from your experience in providing palliative care.

f) **Request their support of PCV’s 2016 Budget Call to Action**

Ask them to speak to their colleagues and use the mechanisms of Parliament to garner support for increased investment in palliative care in the 2016 Budget. Indicate we are seeking at least $16.45M in new recurrent annual funding for palliative care to:
• Expand palliative care services and options
• Increase in-home palliative care and support for carers
• Improve equity of access, especially to groups and areas currently missing out.

g) **Link to context and other key policy priorities**

If time permits, the relevance of PCV’s Call to Action can be noted with reference to the:

• Development of a new policy framework
• End of Life Choices Inquiry due to report by 31 May 2016
• Review of advance care planning legislation underway.

If you are meeting with a Labor MP, you can note how increased investment in palliative care supports the Victorian Government’s health and human services reform agenda for:

• Improved service integration with a focus on wrapping holistic services around the person
• Increasing community and home-based service models
• Increasing the flexibility and responsiveness of services
• Funding innovation and reviewing funding models to drive change

Palliative care leads health in these areas and can play a valuable role in helping to achieve the desired reforms.

h) **Follow up after the meeting**

Send a note of thanks after the meeting. Follow up on any undertakings you made, such as an offer to visit the palliative care service or to provide more information or resources.

3. **Relevant PCV Resources**

a) **PCV’s 2016 State Budget Call to Action - Summary**

This document has been sent to all Victorian MPs. It is important that you are very familiar with it and bring copies of it with you to the meeting.

More detailed information about the key recommendations and supporting rationale is available in a much longer paper: **PCV’s State Budget Call to Action Complete Paper**

You may find it helpful to read this as part of your preparation for the meeting; however, long papers such as this will be too onerous for most busy politicians.

The advocacy section of our website - [www.pallcarevic.asn.au/about-pcv/advocacy/](http://www.pallcarevic.asn.au/about-pcv/advocacy/) - includes short papers on:

• Palliative care services in Victoria, 2016
• The need for palliative care
• The quality of life benefits of palliative care
• The economic case for investing in palliative care.
b) **Video of Moira and George**

Stories and testimonials about personal experiences of palliative care are very effective in creating engagement and building understanding of palliative care and its value.

Ideally, you would bring with you to the meeting with the MP a person who can share their personal experience of palliative care.

Alternatively, you could show this very effective and engaging video of Moira and George, using an iPAD. The link to the video is on this page of our website: http://www.pallcarevic.asn.au/families-patients/about-palliative-care-2/

c) **Living, Dying and Grieving Well Booklet**

We suggest you bring several copies of this short guide to palliative care to give to the MP and let them know that PCV can provide further free copies at any stage. MPs are often approached by their constituents to assist with issues and knowing about palliative care and how to make referrals is helpful.

4. **Local stories**

When preparing for the meeting, think about local examples / stories you can use to illustrate the benefits of palliative care and the problems/issues that can only be addressed with increased investment. Also highlight the relevance of palliative care to particular portfolio responsibilities the MP may have, where appropriate.

Local stories will highlight the relevance of palliative care and the Call to Action to local constituents in the MP’s electorate.

5. **Thank you**

Gaining recognition of the value of palliative care among all Victorian MPs and their support for increased investment in palliative care is a very high priority.

We appreciate your support of what needs to be a concerted, collaborative and sustained effort.

Given the small team at PCV, we need your support to reach out to all MPs across Victoria. It would also be helpful if you could indicate your support for the work PCV as your peak body.

Please contact me for further information or assistance – call 9662 9644, M 0488191198 or email owaanders@pallcarevic.asn.au.

Many thanks,

Odette Waanders
CEO

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