Your privacy

Palliative care social workers are bound by confidentiality and ethical standards set out by the Australian Association of Social Workers. They work within the privacy laws of the state of Victoria.

How can I contact a palliative care social worker?

You are able to contact the social worker on your own behalf, whether you are a patient, carer or family member. When possible, the person making contact has the permission of the patient and all close family members.

Ring your local palliative care provider to ask for an appointment. If you do not know who your local provider is, contact Palliative Care Victoria, phone (03) 9662 9644.
What is a social worker?
Social workers help people identify their social and personal needs and then help find the best possible ways to address them. Each palliative care team has a social worker or someone who performs this role.

When could I need a palliative care social worker?
Being diagnosed with a terminal illness and confronting the issues surrounding death can bring about changes that cause concern. These concerns may be related to social, family and personal changes.

Social changes may include:
- no longer being responsible for your family or household,
- having to leave work or study,
- reduced income,
- being unable to join in social activities or sport.

Family changes may include:
- worrying about how your illness will affect your family or household,
- conflict or tension within your family,
- worrying about the consequences of your death on your family, especially children.

Personal changes may include:
- changes in your body image, self-confidence or feelings about sex,
- feeling low, sad or confused,
- facing your death or fear of dying,
- being unable to do the things you used to do,
- needing to find new ways of enjoying life.

You may also have questions about your illness and how to manage it.

A palliative care social worker can help.

What do palliative care social workers do?
Talk with you about your concerns:
- Listen to you and support you through periods of change or crisis.
- Offer short-term or ongoing counselling.
- Provide education and information about family issues, illness, death and the health care system.

Palliative care social workers can also:
- Assist you to access your entitled benefits,
- Refer you to other members of the palliative care team. For example:
  - If you would like companionship and practical support, you may be referred to a palliative care volunteer. A palliative care volunteer may be especially useful if your family and friends are overburdened or not close by.
  - If you need to talk about end of life or spiritual questions, you may be referred to a Pastoral Carer.
  - If you need assistance with daily activities you may be referred to an Occupational Therapist.
- Help you to communicate effectively with your health care providers.
- Link you and your family to resources in the community, including organisations and support groups that are specific to your illness.
- Represent you and your family to other agencies including your workplace or school.