

Palliative care

"Palliative care is high quality health care and support for people living with a life-limiting illness and their families. Palliative care helps people to live as well as they can by managing pain and symptoms to ensure their quality of life is maintained as the illness progresses."



- Palliative Care Australia



Palliative care includes provision of supports for physical, social, psychosocial and spiritual issues.

Quality palliative care

- Affirms life and regards dying as a normal process
- Neither hastens nor postpones death
- Integrates physical, social, psychological and spiritual aspects of patient care
- Uses a team approach to address the needs of patients and their supporters
- Should be considered early, following diagnosis of a life-limiting condition

National context



It is estimated that **70%** of Australians would prefer to die at home, **but only 15% do.**

Demand for palliative care services is increasing due to a growing population, an ageing population and increases in the prevalence of cancer and other chronic diseases.

The National Palliative Care Strategy 2018 affirms that person-centred palliative care may include multiple services and supports:



Specialist palliative care



General practice and primary care



Other specialists, including medical, nursing and allied health



Grief and bereavement support



Community, disability, aged and social services



Social, spiritual, cultural and community connections

A person-centred approach to palliative care is especially critical for marginalised communities who face systemic barriers to accessing services, including:

- Aboriginal and/or Torres Strait Islander people
- People living with a mental illness and/or harmful drug use
- People living with dementia
- People with disability
- People experiencing homelessness or at risk of homelessness
- Multicultural communities
- LGBTIQ+ communities



Gippsland data

Annual deaths in Gippsland by sex (2019–2023)



By 2030, there will be a total of 4,247 deaths annually, based on an average **growth of 4.4% per year** (2019–2023).

In 2024, Gippsland had a lower rate of palliative care nurses per 100,000 population, at 10.6 full-time equivalents (FTE), compared to the national rate (13.1).

Gippsland 2023–2024 data:

Approximately 31% of all deaths were in **residential aged care homes (RACHs)**.

50% fewer **Medicare-subsidised services provided by palliative medicine physicians or specialists** per 100,000 population (131) compared to the national rate (264).

Fourth highest rate of **palliative care-related prescriptions** nationally, with 57% more prescriptions per 100,000 population (8,537) compared to the national rate (5,427).

Highest rate of **non-admitted patient palliative care** service events in Australia, with 102% more events per 10,000 population (756) compared to the national rate (374).

1,405 **palliative care-related hospitalisations** among Gippsland residents. Between 2020–2021 and 2023–2024, hospitalisations increased by an average of 8% per year, higher than the national average increase of 6%.

An analysis of primary palliative care hospital admissions for Gippsland residents (2019–2020 to 2024–2025) showed:

An increase in admissions for Aboriginal and/or Torres Strait Islander peoples from 1.0% in 2019–2020 to 2.5% in 2024–2025.

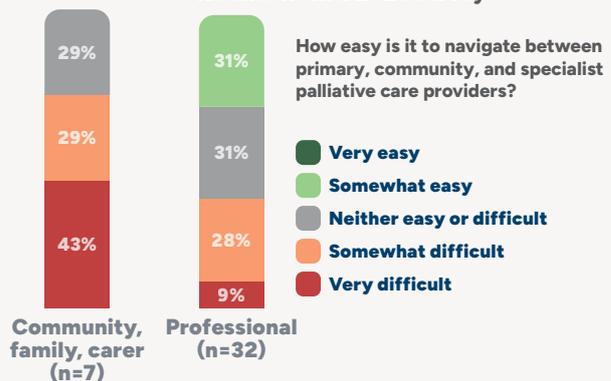
81% of admissions were for people aged 65+.

95% of admissions were to a Gippsland hospital.

The average length of stay was 6.6 days; 23% of admissions were for an overnight or shorter stay.

69% of admissions resulted in the patient dying; 18% went home (private); 7% to a residential aged care home (RACH) and 4% to acute hospital care.

Results from a 2025 survey



Professional perspective

Key themes from Gippsland PHN stakeholder consultations in 2025:

-  Person-centred care is essential to support care at home.
-  Awareness of palliative care pathways varies.
-  Uncertainty around referral pathways and available services and supports.
-  Difficulty coordinating care across primary, community and specialist palliative care services, compounded by variable communication methods and systems.
-  Early identification of palliative care needs and deterioration is essential for high-quality care.
-  Gaps in service availability and limited capacity of specialist palliative care services.
-  Rural and regional areas rely heavily on generalist service providers to deliver palliative care.
-  Limited access to funding through My Aged Care can create financial barriers, including for people under 65 years.
-  Timely prescribing and medication access remain significant challenges, particularly after-hours.
-  Access to palliative care in residential aged care homes varies due to differences in processes and workforce capacity.

“ I want us to work to sustain the workforce we have. ”
- Health professional

“ Good clinicians know how to talk to extract what is most important. ”
- Nurse

Priority needs

The Gippsland PHN Palliative Care Needs Assessment 2025 identified priority areas for support:

Suitably skilled and supported workforce across the region

- Increased ability and confidence to provide palliative care among primary healthcare professionals, including recognising signs of deterioration.
- Improved ability to provide person-centred palliative care through a multidisciplinary approach.

Equitable access to palliative care services across Gippsland

- Improved access to person-centred palliative care for marginalised communities.

Integration and coordination of primary, community and specialist palliative care services

- Appropriate, timely, accessible and clear referral pathways from primary care to specialist palliative care, including in RACHs.
- Appropriate access to relevant patient information, including after hours.

Community awareness and understanding of palliative care

- Improved awareness of palliative care including timely Advance Care Planning (ACP) and End-of-Life Planning.
- Increased confidence among the primary health workforce to talk about death and dying to raise awareness of palliative care.

Community, consumer and carer perspective

Key themes from Gippsland PHN stakeholder consultations in 2025:

-  Community awareness of palliative care is low.
-  Awareness of palliative care pathways and available services varies across the health workforce.
-  Fragmented care coordination contributes to unmanaged symptoms and increased carer burden.
-  Limited access to palliative care services across the Gippsland region, especially after-hours.
-  Geographical and socio-economic barriers, including distance, transport, cost of services and supports, access to telehealth and low literacy (including digital).
-  There are gaps in available support services.

“ [Good palliative care means that]... I get support so I can simply focus on them [my loved one] - talk to them, hold their hand, just be there, be present. ”
- Community member

“ I want palliative care services to support families. ”
- Community member

Service system



The **Gippsland Regional Palliative Care Consortium** is an alliance of **14 member agencies** that provide inpatient and/or community palliative care for the residents of Gippsland, supported by the Victorian Government.

Palliative and end of life care in Gippsland is also supported by:

- 100 general practice clinics
- 54 residential aged care homes (RACHs)
- The **Palliative Care Consultancy Gippsland (PCCG)**
- **Victorian Palliative Care Advice Service** for everyone in Victoria
- **Victorian Virtual Specialist Consults (VVSC)** supports general practitioners, nurses, allied health professionals and other primary care providers

“ I want clear information from my palliative care team. ”
- Community member

Gippsland PHN services and supports

- Projects as part of the **Greater Choice for At Home Palliative Care** program to improve access and care coordination
- Support for residential aged care homes, including an **after-hours toolkit**
- Palliative care education and training
- Gippsland Pathways** for primary care health professionals in Gippsland
- Support for the **General Practice in Aged Care Incentive** for older people living in residential aged care

“ I want up to date information about what palliative care services are available and how to access them. ”
- Community member

Access more Gippsland PHN publications here

