

THE CHALLENGE

HNECC PHN received new Department of Health funding under the Greater Choice for At Home Palliative Care measure (GCfAPHC). The aim is to improve palliative care coordination in primary care and increase choice for more people to be cared for and die at home.

As a new area of commissioning for the PHN, our first priority was to gain an understanding of the region's existing palliative care services, current pathways, knowledge gaps and opportunities for service improvement. To develop a robust needs assessment plan whilst managing limited resourcing, the PHN issued a competitive tender for the required expertise.

Rebbeck were engaged to support the PHN team to conduct a literature review, retrieve datasets from publicly accessible sites, identify key stakeholders and develop hypotheses to be tested.

THE APPROACH

The PHN team developed key questions for qualitative data collection as guided by the themes in the needs assessment plan. The team leveraged new and existing relationships with key stakeholders to identify suitable participants across our geographically and culturally diverse region. Our activities included:

1. Targeted 1:1 online interviews with clinicians working in, or with experience of palliative care across primary and tertiary care settings
2. Eight focus groups via expressions of interest with key stakeholder groups including Central Coast and Hunter New England LHD's Specialist Palliative Care Teams, PHN Clinical Council & Community Advisory Committees, Community Service Providers and Residential Aged Care Facilities
3. Public dissemination of a consumer survey targeting palliative persons, carers/family members of palliative persons and general community members
4. Distribution of a clinician survey to a network of local health professionals including medical, nursing and allied health practitioners
5. Collection and collation of local de-identified palliative care service and referral data.

Interview and focus group transcriptions, survey data and service and referral data, were collected and provided to Rebbeck for analysis.

Two methods were used to assess the findings:

1. **Triangulation matrix** – to assess the level of evidence in support of the hypothesised need
2. **Prioritisation score** – to assess the size, severity, and addressability of each hypothesised need.



Acknowledgment: Our Primary Health Network acknowledges the traditional custodians of the land we walk upon today and respects their continuing culture and the contribution they make to the life of this vast region.

THE IMPACT

Robust data analysis allowed us to identify priority needs and subsequently develop action statements for the three main target stakeholder groups.

Patient priority actions:

- Improve timely referrals and interventions for patients who require palliative care (particularly non-malignant or dementia diagnoses)
- Increase the health literacy of palliative care patients to improve health outcomes, quality of life and experience of care
- Improve health professional understanding of the importance of palliative patient access to cultural and religious rituals around dying and death, increasing ability for patients to participate in these rituals
- Improve access to palliative care for patients facing financial and housing instability and for patients from migrant backgrounds.

Family and Carer priority actions:

- Increase support for family and carers of a palliative patient following a bereavement and reduce their risk of suicide (particularly those aged 80+)
- Educate carers and family members on their role in patient care and how to identify signs of end of life.

Clinician priority actions:

- Improve access to quality information, resources and timely prescriptions for nurses
- Support clinicians to identify and manage compassion fatigue and burnout when caring for patients at end of life.

THE LEARNINGS

- ✓ High levels of engagement and feedback from both the workforce and broader community reflected the passion in this sector, the strength of new and existing PHN relationships, and afforded opportunities for increased collaboration in current and future work.
- ✓ Conducting a comprehensive needs assessment allowed the team to be targeted and intentional in identifying the greatest needs with our limited allocated funding.
- ✓ Having a well-developed and clear needs assessment plan with stepped milestones and assigned responsibilities contributed to the activity's success and showcases a blueprint that can be clearly communicated to all stakeholders.
- ✓ Comprehensive data collection and analysis will be used as evidence in reporting to potential funding bodies to advocate for further funding opportunities for this program.



To view the full needs assessment report please scan here

