

Australia's prison population is growing and aging, and with this comes an increasing burden on the healthcare services provided in prisons, including palliative care. Although this increase in palliative care needs has been recognised, not enough is known about the extent of services that are needed and more specifically, where and how resources should be allocated to provide equitable access to palliative or end of life care.

Authored by 2022 Jeff Cheverton Memorial Scholarship recipient Dr Isabelle Schaefer (University of Technology Sydney) and released today by the Australian Healthcare and Hospitals Association's Deeble Institute for Health Policy Research, the Issues Brief '[Ensuring the quality of palliative care in Australia's prisons](#)' examines what is known about the provision of palliative care in Australian prisons and identifies the knowledge gaps that exist for service delivery and how they compare to services in the community.

'Having access to quality palliative care is a right of all Australians including people who are serving sentences in prisons. It is vital that we understand how this care is currently being delivered in order to provide value-based health care that optimises a person's health outcomes for the cost of care,' says AHHA Acting Chief Executive Kylie Woolcock.

People in prisons have higher instances of chronic and age-related diseases and experience these earlier in life than those in the general community. This means that they also need palliative care services at a younger age.

'Opportunities to provide high value palliative care services within the prison environment will also become increasingly important in the sustainability of health services more broadly.

'We know that preventing a single palliative care hospital admission can save \$11,000. Cost-savings and reductions in the length of hospital admissions can be achieved when people have early access to palliative and end of life care,' says Ms Woolcock.

While national data relating to the health of people in Australian prisons is collected, this does not currently include data directly relating to palliative care.

'The lack of available data may result in a disconnect between the services people need and the services that they are getting.

'We need to introduce standardised and regular data collection to inform evidence-based policy on palliative care in prisons, to evaluate cost-effectiveness of existing care, and monitor its quality.

'The strategy behind the data collection needs to be useful for both policymakers and clinicians. It should have clear definitions, metadata, data management protocols with collection methods specially designed for use in a prison environment.'

The online version of this [media release](#) and the Perspectives Brief '[Ensuring the quality of palliative care in Australia's prisons](#)' can be found on the AHHA website.

The Australian Healthcare and Hospitals Association is the national peak body for public and not-for-profit healthcare.

Media enquiries: Kylie Woolcock, Acting Chief Executive, AHHA

0410 625 830