



# Mercy Health Home Care



Home Care



Queensland  
Cairns



Victoria  
North West Melbourne  
Geelong

## Goal

To empower staff, foster confidence in their roles and skills development, and promote a proactive approach to palliative care.

## Highlights

- Increased staff confidence in providing care in the end stages of life, with life-affirming results
- Improved links to external palliative care services
- Developed internal professional connections to provide effective end of life care
- Improved knowledge of local cross sector services
- Worked alongside and supported by the ELDAC Linkages facilitators throughout the program

Mercy Health Home Care is dedicated to enhancing the quality of life for all clients and providing support to their caregivers. Across Cairns, North West Melbourne, and Geelong, a team of approximately 265 staff, including home care workers, nurses, care advisors, and support staff provide in-home care to thousands of clients. The North West Melbourne and Geelong hubs service approximately 2000 people, representing a multicultural community, including Greek, Italian, Lebanese, Vietnamese, Chinese and Australian clients.

Mercy Health Home Care operates on a small-scale team model, which facilitates continuity of care, an approach that guarantees that every staff member who interacts with clients, their caregivers, and their circle of health professionals, fully understands the client's goals.

Mercy Health Home Care staff have established working relationships with key healthcare providers, including general practitioners, allied health professionals, discharge planners, other aged care services, and palliative care specialists. Participation in the ELDAC Linkages program provided an opportunity to further strengthen collaborations and review its own palliative care approaches.

Prior to participating in the ELDAC Linkages program, Mercy Health Home Care recognised that many home care workers, care advisors, and some nurses felt challenged by palliative care. A lack of mandatory training, with few opportunities available, meant that some staff had gaps in their knowledge and practice. Many associated the term 'palliative' with concepts such as 'too complex', 'high needs', and 'death', and 'I can't do that'. Understandably, staff were reluctant to participate in service provision of a palliative client. They were unaware of the benefits of a palliative care approach, and that palliative care is not always about 'death', and so often is about providing basic care such as personal care and pain relief, with the option of specialty assistance through a palliative care team.

One of the main goals they hoped to achieve was to increase staff's understanding of what palliative care actually means, and how to plan a palliative care approach for client care.

This goal was challenged by a lack of focus for palliative care-specific training opportunities for staff, as well as a limited number of clients opting for end of life care at home. Mercy Health Home Care was therefore eager to embrace the unique opportunities available through the ELDAC Linkages program.

Through the ELDAC Linkages program, Mercy Health Home Care's primary objective was to enhance staff understanding of palliative care, emphasizing the essential role it plays in improving the quality of life for clients. By demystifying and highlighting the supportive nature of palliative care, Mercy Health Home Care aimed to foster a more compassionate and informed approach among staff.

Another goal was to increase staff's understanding of advance care planning, and advance care directives. Often staff didn't understand these concepts and therefore were reluctant to initiate the discussion. Mercy Health Home Care acknowledged that as part of a client-directed care

approach, client preferences for their life journey should be considered.

With support from the ELDAC Linkages program facilitators, Mercy Health Home Care also took steps to establish relationships with local palliative specialist providers and promoted better communication and teamwork in coordinating care for shared clients. Mercy Health Home Care achieved significant success in improving staff knowledge and practices related to palliative care, advance care planning, and advance care directives.

The ongoing encouragement and guidance provided by ELDAC facilitators was instrumental in keeping the program on track and achieving set goals. They were always available to answer questions and were very supportive and informative.

For Mercy Health Home Care service the key benefits of participating in the ELDAC Linkages



"What a positive experience. Not only did I learn a lot, but it reinforced that palliative care is about making the client's quality of life the best it can be, the same as we do for every client." A staff member

program were accomplished through workshops and sessions on advance care planning, as well as connections with local health services, where staff members gained valuable insights and resources to facilitate meaningful discussions with clients about their care preferences.

Moreover, significant benefits were achieved by incorporating palliative care learning modules into Mercy Health's Learning platform, and integrating advance care planning and advance care directives into mandatory training, enhanced staff competency in these areas.

The establishment of a relationship between Mercy Health Home Care and a Mercy Health Residential Aged Care Palliative Care clinical nurse consultant further facilitated collaboration and knowledge-sharing, ultimately improving the quality of care provided to clients receiving palliative care services.

A highlight of the ELDAC Linkages journey was the valuable education days that were provided by experts in their fields. These sessions provided an opportunity for all staff; home care workers, nurses, care advisors and training team members to participate and learn. Participants also shared stories, knowledge, and their insights into palliative care and advance care planning gaps within the organisation.

These sessions improved staff confidence to provide palliative care to a client, from diagnosis through to end of life, with life-affirming results.

Statements such as 'I didn't know there was a difference between palliative care and end of life care', and 'I thought Advance Care Directives were Not for Resuscitation Orders!' from staff attending these sessions evidenced that the focused training not only provided education but some myth-busting as well.

During the training days, conversations reinforced the importance for organisational changes that were needed such as developing internal professional connections to a Mercy Health Residential Aged Care Palliative Care clinical nurse consultant, and that being linked with external palliative care services was paramount in providing effective palliative care to Mercy Health Home Care clients. Incorporating advance care planning and advance care directives into mandatory staff training was also seen as an essential requirement.

Attendees have spoken highly about these sessions, and as a result many enquiries regarding the next scheduled sessions have been received.

The feedback and suggestions from staff following education sessions provided evidence for the need for specific improvements. More education around advance care planning and advance care directives was highlighted, and as a result an educational piece was circulated to staff. These topics have been built into mandatory training, and a home care procedure is being reviewed. Better relationships with specialist palliative care organisations was also highlighted, and as a result meetings were organised with main stakeholders in each of the regions and relationship building commenced.

## Key outcomes

- Improved connections with a local health service advance care planning team
- Improved advance care planning procedures for the home care business
- Conducted an aged care and palliative care-focused education workshop
- Created an advance care planning information flyer, placed in all client welcome packs (directed by the National Manager)
- Incorporated palliative care learning modules into the Mercy Learning platform for all staff
- Incorporated advance care planning and advance care directives into mandatory training
- Built relationships between Mercy Health Home Care and Mercy Health Residential Aged Care Palliative Care clinical nurse consultant



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