Inquiry Name: Inquiry into End of Life Choices

Subject: Lack of Hospice Facilities for Patients with Life Limiting Disease

Currently, Swan Hill’s Community Palliative Care (with only 2 nurses) services a population of 45,183 people in a 150km radius (35000 sq kilometers) that covers 3 shires in Victoria (Rural City of Swan Hill (excluding Robinvale), Shire of Gannawarra (excluding Cohuna) and the Shire of Buloke) - 8% of Victoria. There are always 65-75 patients being treated at any time. There has recently been an influx of 17 patients in the last month. The central hospital facility in this area is located in Swan Hill, 344 km north west of Melbourne. Unfortunately, the current health service does not extend to the provision of hospice care for palliative patients, it has a palliative care room which is an acute ward bedroom that is set aside for palliative care patients however this is not funded as a palliative care bed and has the same time and resource constraints of an acute bed; it is also staffed by the Acute ward staff who have excellent clinical acute care skills though no formalised end of life care training. The closest hospice is located at Bendigo 200km from Swan Hill. The personal cost to visit and support loved ones is both emotionally and financially exhausting for both the family and the patient. We have formed a committee to seek support for the establishment of a fully functioning, two bed hospice, with the potential to expand this service. We have formed a dedicated committee of 15 with varying backgrounds and ages to help achieve establishing a hospice in Swan Hill, which is being supported by Swan Hill District Health (SHDH). A new Aged Care facility for SHDH is currently in development, and the existing building has been identified as a possible location for a hospice, once the new development is complete in 2016. SHDH has communicated that it is committed to the provision of ongoing staffing of such a hospice facility on the condition that seed and ongoing funding can be secured for the refit and staffing of the facility 24/7. The SHDH was identified as an area that needed a sub acute facility back in 2010 by the Department of Health however due to a lack of space, this facility was neither funded nor forthcoming. With the relocation of the nursing home into new premises, the space is available for the sub acute facility and this could then include the hospice units. In addition to the facility and the ongoing staffing, everything required within a hospice is able to be purchased due to the generous donations of the local community who are very supportive of the Hospice becoming a reality.

To be able to achieve the provision of such an important facility for the region of Swan Hill is what is driving the committee. To allow patients and their families to go through the final stages of life in a comfortable, dignified and home like environment in their home district surrounded by their family and friends and support network will be a significantly positive outcome.

It is very clearly visible that we have full support from the generosity of the community as there has been over $124,696.00 raised to support for this much needed facility in the 8 months since its inception.

We urge the State & Federal government to put more effort and funding in to ensuring that all patients have access to the best palliative care facilities at the end-of-life within their local communities.