

30 GOVERNMENT INQUIRIES: WHY BOTHER?

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Like many other nations, Australia is seeking to improve both the level of integration of delivery of health care, and better address the health needs of its people through significant health system reform. Invariably the reform process is dotted with consultations, discussion papers and numerous opportunities to respond to semi-developed concepts through the mechanism of written submissions.

Preparing a written submission is a time consuming process for both individual practitioners who have an interest, and small NGOs with limited staff and diverse demands on their time. Despite competing priorities, Palliative Care Australia has found that the process of carefully preparing written submissions, accompanied by various mechanisms of advocacy, provides considerable opportunity to achieve systemic improvement of access to, and delivery of, end of life care.

The primary example used in this presentation will address the current Productivity Commission inquiry into Caring for Older Australians, although other relevant inquiries, such as the National Health and Hospitals Reform Commission and the Advanced Care Directives inquiry will also be addressed. In each of these cases, explanation will be provided of successful techniques to ensure that messages supporting improved palliative care are conveyed to key decision makers such as politicians and governmental policy creators. Mechanisms discussed include collaboration with like-minded organisations to both pool resources and boost impact, ensuring that the needs of the membership base are met, the importance of robust and evidence based material and the value of direct lobbying.

All reports from current significant inquiries in Australia are now addressing palliative care. Late 2010 saw the Senate strongly supporting a motion to improve funding and access. It is definitely worth responding to government inquiries – but just writing a letter is simply not enough.