

Palliative Care Definition

Palliative care is the active holistic care of individuals across all ages with serious health-related sufferingⁱ due to severe illnessⁱⁱ, and especially of those near the end of life. It aims to improve the quality of life of patients, their families and their caregivers.

Palliative care:

- Includes, prevention, early identification, comprehensive assessment and management of physical issues, including pain and other distressing symptoms, psychological distress, spiritual distress and social needs. Whenever possible, these interventions must be evidence based.
- Provides support to help patients live as fully as possible until death by facilitating effective communication, helping them and their families determine goals of care.
- Is applicable throughout the course of an illness, according to the patient's needs.
- Is provided in conjunction with disease modifying therapies whenever needed.
- May positively influence the course of illness.
- Intends neither to hasten nor postpone death, affirms life, and recognizes dying as a natural process.
- Provides support to the family and the caregivers during the patient's illness, and in their own bereavement.
- Is delivered recognizing and respecting the cultural values and beliefs of the patient and the family.
- Is applicable throughout all health care settings (place of residence and institutions) and in all levels (primary to tertiary).
- Can be provided by professionals with basic palliative care training.
- Requires specialist palliative care with a multiprofessional team for referral of complex cases.

To achieve palliative care integration, governments should:

1. Adopt adequate policies and norms that include palliative care in health laws, national health programs and national health budgets;
2. Ensure that insurance plans integrate palliative care as a component of programs;
3. Ensure access to essential medicines and technologies for pain relief and palliative care, including pediatric formulations;
4. Ensure that palliative care is part of all health services (from community health-based programs to hospitals), that everyone is assessed, and that all staff can provide basic palliative care with specialist teams available for referral and consultation;
5. Ensure access to adequate palliative care for vulnerable groups, including children and older persons;
6. Engage with universities, academia and teaching hospitals to include palliative care research as well as palliative care training as an integral component of ongoing education, including basic, intermediate, specialist, and continuing education.

ⁱ Suffering is health-related when it is associated with illness or injury of any kind. Health related suffering is serious when it cannot be relieved without medical intervention and when it compromises physical, social and/or emotional functioning. Available in <http://pallipedia.org/serious-health-related-suffering-shs/>

ⁱⁱ Severe illness is understood as any acute or chronic illness and/or condition that causes significant impairment, and may lead to long-term impairment, disability and/or death. Available at <http://pallipedia.org/serious-illness/>