

Joint Position Statement

ACSA, LASA and Meaningful Ageing Australia

Spiritual Care: Integral to Flourishing in Later Life

For release October 2018

This is a joint position statement from Aged and Community Services Australia (ACSA), Leading Age Services Australia (LASA) and Meaningful Ageing Australia.

Spirituality can be thought of as being the way people seek and express meaning and purpose in their lives. Each person's spirituality is an essential part of their identity, and may or may not be expressed through faith or religion. Whether people have a set of formal spiritual beliefs or not, they need their views and needs to be taken seriously, especially when they are ill and/or vulnerable.

Aged care service providers have a role in supporting individuals and providing spiritual care. The best spiritual care responds to a person's search for meaning, self-worth, and their need to express themselves to a sensitive and compassionate listener. It occurs across a continuum from informal to formal and can be included by staff in a range of roles.

Meaningful Ageing was the lead partner in a Commonwealth Government funded project to produce *National Guidelines for Spiritual Care in Aged Care*¹.

Numerous studies demonstrate the role of spiritual support in overall wellbeing including health outcomes such as increased hope, greater longevity, coping skills, health-related quality of life, and less anxiety, depression and suicide. People can be better supported to prepare for their final months and weeks of life through reflecting on their life and its contribution, exploring unresolved issues, reinforcing their worth and having their preferences recorded and respected.

Families, loved ones and staff form a vital part of the older person's care team. For families, spiritual support is associated with increased overall family satisfaction. Sensitive spiritual support for families in the time leading up to end-of-life and immediately after their loved one has died is essential.

In order for staff to be fully available and present to the people in their care, they need to be given the opportunity to acknowledge their experiences of being a carer, and allowed to develop their inner resources, including knowing what matters most to them. This may include formal spiritual support.

¹ <https://meaningfulageing.org.au/wp-content/uploads/2016/08/National-Guidelines-for-Spiritual-Care-in-Aged-Care-DIGITAL.pdf>

ACSA, LASA and Meaningful Ageing Australia support the core values in the Guidelines:

- Respect and acceptance
- Compassion and empathy
- Inclusion and diversity
- Dignity.

To support integrated spiritual care, older people accessing aged care should be offered screening using contemporary approaches by staff who have had training in basic spiritual support, followed by more in-depth support from a spiritual care practitioner or other suitably qualified person as needed. To enable a meaningful life, each older person's spirituality and need for connection should influence all aspects of the care plan.

ACSA, LASA and Meaningful Ageing Australia congratulate the Australian Government for acknowledging the importance of understanding and maintaining each person's identity, spirituality and human need for meaning in the new *Single Aged Care Quality Standards* and Australian Aged Care Quality Agency Guidance Material. For instance, a provider is to offer services and supports for daily living that "promote each consumer's emotional, spiritual and psychological well-being".

Despite the significance of spirituality for ageing and within end-of-life and palliative care, there is currently no funding specifically for spiritual support. LASA, ACSA and Meaningful Ageing Australia would like to see the universal acceptance of the importance of spiritual support in aged care for all stages of the ageing journey until death.

ACSA, LASA and Meaningful Ageing Australia call for:

- Integration of person-centred spiritual support into aged care models, including those for end-of-life. Ideally, this should allow people to choose the type of spiritual support they need whether they are at home, in residential care or in hospital.
- Resource allocation, including via the Aged Care Funding Instrument, home care subsidies and State-funded palliative care, should recognise the need for spiritual support and that this requires a person-centred approach, access to workers with the right capabilities and time to listen. The Resource Utilisation and Classification Study recommendations should accommodate best practice spiritual support.
- The Government to recognise the spiritual support dimension in its increased funding for palliative care in residential aged care which will be available from 2019-20, after planning for this over 2018-19.
- Care models and adequate funding to allow people to participate in activities that give their lives meaning such as engagement with the local community and activities such as involvement with pets, gardening, mens'-shed activities, and cooking etc.

- A considered Government response to the Productivity Commission Report: Reforms to Human Services (2018)² which includes a section on end-of-life care.
- Workforce reform directions, which will be informed by the work of the Aged Care Workforce Strategy Taskforce, to take into account the need for access to spiritual support and the workforce capabilities and resources required to deliver this.
- Support for organisations to implement the federally funded *National Guidelines for Spiritual Care in Aged Care*.
- Recognition that spiritual support is a vital element of quality of life and should be offered on a foundation of quality clinical care for older Australians – a sustainable aged care funding strategy is required to deliver on all dimensions of this.

Who are we?

Aged & Community Services Australia (ACSA) is a peak body supporting over 700 church, charitable and community-based not-for-profit organisations that provide accommodation and care services to over 450,000 older Australians. ACSA represents and supports members to achieve excellence in providing quality affordable housing and community and residential care services for older Australians.

Leading Age Services Australia (LASA) is a national peak body representing and supporting providers of age services across residential care, home care and retirement living. We represent our Members by advocating their views on issues of importance and we support our members by providing information, services, training and events that enhance their performance and sustainability.

Meaningful Ageing Australia is the national peak body for spiritual care and ageing. Meaningful Ageing Australia's mission is to enable access to high quality pastoral and spiritual care for all older people in Australia. We do this by creating high quality, practical resources; education services and advocacy.

² <https://www.pc.gov.au/inquiries/completed/human-services/reforms/report/01-human-services-reforms-life.pdf>