



**DecisionAssist**

*Palliative Care and Advance Care  
Planning for Aged Care*

# palliAGED

## Information in your hand

### Why an app on palliative care was developed.

The pattern of disease and death in Australia has changed significantly over the last century, with a marked increase in life expectancy as well as a rise in chronic disease rates. Figures suggest that up to 50% of deaths are expected which means there is an opportunity to plan and provide care in a place of the person's choosing.

General Practitioners (GPs) and other clinicians are recognised as having a central role in planning and providing care. However, GPs who are treating older Australians, living either in a residential aged care facility or at home, may only have limited experience in palliative care.



### of deaths are expected

The use of software, including smartphone applications (apps), provides opportunities for information and resources to be readily on hand for people working with individuals with complex health needs. A new app, palliAGED, makes high quality, palliative care information available to GPs on their smart devices.

An environmental scan, undertaken in early 2015, showed that only a small number of palliative care specific apps were available, even though smartphones are widely used by physicians. The Decision Assist project, which is an Australian Government funded initiative, set out to develop an app that would support GPs in providing palliative care to older Australians in residential aged care as well as people living in the community.

# The palliAGED app

## Why was the app developed?

palliAGED was developed to support GPs caring for older people living at home or in residential care who are coming to the end of their life. The app is designed to be used according to the clinician's best clinical judgement and to support decision making.

## What does the app include?

The app utilises an existing palliative care framework that is based on three specific clinical processes that a GP can use to proactively manage a person's care needs. These include:

- **Advance care planning.**
- **Case conferencing.**
- **Terminal care management.**

It provides prescribing guidance outlined by the Palliative Approach (PA) Toolkit Project document that acts as a "guide to the pharmacological management of end-of-life (terminal) symptoms in residential aged care residents".

## Is the information accurate and relevant?

The content within the app uses documents and materials developed and reviewed as part of the PA Toolkit Project. This content is reviewed by a number of different health care professionals, aged care representatives and is approved by the Australian Government's Department of Social Services.

The palliative care framework highlighted in the app has been used in the GP Palliative Care Education and Resources Project, a project of Decision Assist. The app was designed and built by Decision Assist's Guidance and Technological Innovation Project Group based at Flinders University in South Australia. As it is a web-based app, it is updated regularly as new information and resources emerge. Several new items will be added in late 2015.



Telephone advisory number

# 1300 668 908

# What other support is available?

At the top of the app screen, the telephone advisory number is available to all aged care staff, including GPs, who have specific advance care planning and/or palliative care questions. The line is staffed by operators with extensive experience who are able to provide answers or direct callers to the most appropriate local services.

The app also includes a resource page, which is divided into five topic categories:

- **Decision Assist GP Education Resources**
- **General GP Resources**
- **Carer Information**
- **Finding Services**
- **Medicine Information**

**Telephone advisory number 1300 668 908**

# How much does the app cost?

The app is **free to download** and does not include any additional purchases within the app once it is downloaded. To find out more, visit the Decision Assist website at [www.decisionassist.org.au](http://www.decisionassist.org.au)



# Decision Assist: Linkages Project

## Decision assist project

Decision Assist is an Australian Government funded project that aims to enhance the provision of palliative care and advance care planning services to older Australians. This large program has several different components in order to try and meet the needs of the different staff that deliver care in the aged care sector.



**The Linkages Project has funded 20 demonstration projects throughout Australia with the aim to establish and strengthen links between aged care providers and specialist palliative services.**

## Professional partnerships: Barriers and enablers

Australia's aged care system is complex and can be difficult to navigate. To accommodate increased rates of chronic disease and longevity, increasing costs, varied accessibility to services and workforce issues, aged care services often seek to collaborate with the health sector to provide the best care possible. However, establishing effective relationships between different services, or sometimes within the same service, can be a considerable challenge.

The literature indicates key barriers that often exist between residential aged care facilities and specialist palliative care organisations. These include:

- **Systemic issues including jurisdictional strategic priorities, silo mentality of services, and uncertainty of funding.**
- **Workforce instability and turnover.**
- **Time and resource constraints.**
- **Resistance to change by staff.**

Aged care and palliative care have historically operated relatively independently of one another. However, with changing care delivery, the evidence suggests that links between these two groups may result in more positive outcomes for consumers and providers. These include:

A decrease in preventable hospital admissions that can result in a decrease in physical and psychological stresses on the person, their family and their carers, a decreased risk of a negative clinical event occurring, and a decrease in associated costs.

Improved capacity of service providers and potential up-skilling of staff giving them more confidence in their ability to provide end of life care.

Improved ability of the service provider to meet a person's wishes for their preferred place of death.

Improved care delivery (e.g. pain management, symptom control, psychological support).

The literature advocates that implementing a number of strategies can successfully establish and strengthen effective relationships between organisations. Strategies shown to do this include:

1. Formalised agreements.
2. Role descriptions.
3. Communication pathways.
4. Multidisciplinary care approaches.
5. Designated linkage workers.
6. Skills and knowledge exchange.
7. Continuous improvement.

In addition to these strategies, there are a number of key enablers and sustainability factors that also need to occur including:

- Effective communication strategies and practices.
- Existing goodwill between partners.
- Executive buy-in.
- Commitment to implement changes.
- Building capacity within services.
- Incorporating changes to organisational strategic objectives and policy, including continuous improvement and staff training.
- Prioritisation and ongoing commitment to these linkages.

The linkage demonstration projects are due for completion in early 2016 so it is not possible to determine the success or learnings from the projects at this stage. However, the six month project reports do support the evidence identified in the literature. It is hoped that the partnerships established as part of these projects is able to be sustained even after linkage projects have been concluded. For more information on the Linkage Project or any other component of Decision Assist please visit [www.decisionassist.com.au](http://www.decisionassist.com.au)