



**DecisionAssist**  
*Palliative Care and Advance Care Planning  
for Aged Care*

## **LINKAGE GUIDANCE SUMMARY DOCUMENT**

### **PROMOTING SERVICE LINKAGES IN PALLIATIVE AND AGED CARE**

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## ABOUT THIS GUIDANCE DOCUMENT AND RESOURCES

Older people at the end of their life often have unique and complex health and support needs. To address these needs, palliative care can be provided in many different settings including public and private hospitals and primary and community care. Palliative care is also provided directly by community and residential aged care services. Many different health professionals and community service providers are involved in providing this care. To ensure high quality and well-coordinated palliative care, teamwork, partnerships and cooperation across services and care providers is required.

As one component of the Decision Assist Project, the Linkages project team has completed a systematic literature review resulting in the development of this Linkage Guidance document. It is anticipated that this document with the supporting resources will enable enhancements of linkages between service providers involved in the delivery of palliative care services to older Australians.

This Guidance document provides information and resources to support improved linkages between specialist palliative care services, general practitioners, and services in receipt of Commonwealth home care or residential aged care funding. Practical guidance on seven specific linkage strategies includes

- Communication pathways
- Formalised agreements
- Role descriptions
- Multidisciplinary care
- Designated linkage workers
- Shared continuing professional development
- Continuous improvement

You may find some of the resources useful as examples to expand and improve your palliative care service delivery. By implementing the strategies included in this document, the quality of end of life care for older people will be improved.

## HOW TO USE THE GUIDANCE DOCUMENT AND RESOURCES

### What will I find to assist me?

This document is designed to be a practical tool to assist you and your organisation to provide a collaborative approach to the delivery of palliative care in your settings. It includes detailed information about seven specific evidence based service linkage strategies. For each of these strategies, you will find the following:

- A brief description of the strategy (to help you understand what is involved)
- Expected outcomes if you use this strategy (to help you understand what can be achieved)
- Tools, resources and templates (to help you implement the strategy in your setting)

### How do I know what linkage strategy to use?

The strategies described in this document have been identified from an extensive review of the literature. While all of the strategies have benefits, it is important to choose the strategy or strategies that suit your organisational context. The following steps can help you determine where to begin, :

1. Prepare a service profile for your own and the proposed partner organisation/s to be involved in the linkage project. Establish a joint planning team and develop clear governance arrangements for your project.
2. Develop a clear map of existing communication channels and shared processes that can be included in your service profile.
3. Examine the linkage strategies described in this document and the outcomes that can be achieved by the various strategies. Identify which strategy/ies have the best potential to improve linkages between your services.
4. Prepare a detailed project plan which outlines actions, responsibilities and resources to implement the linkage strategy.

**Prepare service profiles and establish a planning team**

**Map communication channels**

**Choose linkage strategy/ies**

**Prepare Project Plan**

Goal	Strategy	How will I know it's successful
<p><i>Example:</i> Improve referral practices between services</p>	Communication pathways	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Established contact with local services</li> <li>• Increased meetings arranged to create and maintain linkages</li> <li>• Plan for implementation of shared referral practices</li> </ul>

Linkage Strategy	Strategy Description	Expected Outcome
<b>Organisational Level Strategies</b>		
<b>Communication Pathways</b>	<p>Identify services that do or could contribute to delivering palliative care to older Australians in your local area</p> <p>Shared and standardised documentation and communication processes that support care delivery, including:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• standardised referral forms</li> <li>• agreed assessment tools</li> <li>• handover forms</li> <li>• shared care plans</li> <li>• consumer information about palliative care.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Improved continuity of care</li> <li>• Increased possibility of meeting patient choices</li> <li>• Established contact with local services</li> <li>• Increased meetings arranged to create and maintain linkages</li>   <li>• Shared documentation developed</li> <li>• Increase in shared care plans</li> <li>• Increased continuity of care</li> <li>• Increased case conferencing and communication about care</li> <li>• Increased use of technologies ie telehealth and ehealth records</li> <li>• Consumer information provided</li> <li>• Improved understanding by consumers</li> </ul>
<b>Formalised Agreements and plans</b>	<p>Formalising linkages through written agreements, governance arrangements and plans. Written agreements can ensure discussion of and commitment to:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- resources</li> <li>- mutual responsibilities</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Evidence of formal linkage partnerships established, including formal agreements (MOUs) and shared service plans</li> <li>• Adequate allocation of resources to sustain linkage plan</li> <li>• Evaluation service data to provide information for continuous improvement</li> </ul>

Linkage Strategy	Strategy Description	Expected Outcome
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- agreed outcomes</li> <li>- communication processes</li> <li>- shared terminology.</li> </ul>	
<b>Role descriptions</b>	Clarification of roles and responsibilities, for each practitioner involved in the linkage partnership.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Improved understanding of roles and responsibilities of each partner</li> <li>• Improved continuity of care</li> <li>• Improved communication about care</li> </ul>
<b>Multidisciplinary Care</b>	Regular, scheduled communication (face to face or virtually) with team members from a range of disciplines and services delivering palliative care and aged care	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Increased number of scheduled multidisciplinary interactions</li> <li>• Improved communication between service providers</li> <li>• Increased number of shared care plans</li> <li>• Increased confidence in partnering organisations</li> </ul>
<b>Designated linkage worker</b>	Appointment of a key worker whose responsibility it is to act as a care and linkage coordinator across settings	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Shared understanding of the linkage worker role</li> <li>• Improved communication across settings</li> <li>• Increased confidence among linkage partners</li> <li>• Improved continuity of care</li> </ul>
<b>Continuing professional development</b>	Shared education opportunities (formal and informal) to develop capabilities in providing palliative care for older populations	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Number of professional development sessions provided focused on palliative care</li> <li>• Increased knowledge and skills of service providers in providing palliative care</li> </ul>
<b>Continuous improvement</b>	Process for continually reviewing outcomes and processes from linkage activities, reflecting on outcomes and implementing actions in response to identified areas for improvement.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Evidence of participation in quality activities</li> <li>• Minimum data requirements collected and reported.</li> </ul>