

Need for palliative care expected to double by 2060 in most countries, new report by WHO and WISH reveals

A new report by the World Innovation Summit for Health (WISH) – Qatar Foundation’s global health initiative - in collaboration with the World Health Organization (WHO) reveals that the need for palliative care is expected to double by 2060. It highlights that if this global challenge is to be tackled, more community-centred care must be provided and there must be a reframing of understanding of the term, which the authors emphasise is a concept that includes -- but is not limited to -- end-of-life care. They highlight innovative and cost-effective models emerging in Oman and elsewhere.

The report, entitled ‘Palliative Care: How can we respond to ten years of limited progress’, is led by Dr Asmus Hammerich, Director NCDs and Mental Health at the WHO Office for the Eastern Mediterranean Region and Professor Richard Harding, Director of the Cicely Saunders Institute of Palliative Care at King’s College London.

Dr Hammerich said: “The ongoing growth and aging of the global population, as well as the increasing survival rate, pose significant challenges for healthcare systems as more people will be living with chronic and progressing conditions requiring palliative care.”

A decade of slow progress

A decade after the World Health Assembly introduced Resolution 67.19, aimed at making quality palliative care universally accessible, progress remains too slow, the report states.

In May of this year, the World Health Assembly (WHA) called for member states to develop and deliver better palliative care across all age groups as an essential part of universal health coverage; however, only 14 percent of palliative care needs are met around the world today. Access and quality improvements have stalled, particularly in low- and middle-income countries. This global shortfall highlights the urgent need for increased efforts to meet rising demands for compassionate, end-of-life care.

As populations age and chronic conditions become more common, particularly in transitioning countries, the demand for effective care that alleviates suffering and enhances the quality of life—especially for those nearing the end of life—grows.

The report highlights the critical need for generalist palliative care, advocating for its availability beyond specialized facilities. By promoting training for general healthcare providers in palliative care principles, it seeks to integrate these practices into standard healthcare. This approach ensures that all patients, regardless of their condition, receive

comprehensive support, thereby standardizing palliative care across health services and improving access for those in need.

The way forward

This report shows a way forward, highlighting innovative and cost-effective models of training and care from around the world. The authors make the case for more non-specialist end-of-life care around the world.

The report authors have proposed the following specific recommendations for transforming essential palliative care in the years to come:

Health Policies – Ensuring every country has evidence-based national palliative care policies, public funding, and resource-sharing agreements to pool funding, expertise and other resources for effective service delivery.

Empower People and Communities – Improving death literacy and understanding of palliative care, empowering and facilitating community action through ensure that palliative care services meet the needs of the target population.

Education and Training – Providing evidence-based, multi-disciplinary education and training of palliative care and use of essential medicines, mentorship from experienced professionals, development of specialist workforces in low middle income countries (LMICs) to support healthcare forces.

Use of Essential Medicines – Ensuring that countries have all the necessary palliative care medicines for both adults and children, conducting research to gather data on medication usage, patterns, and needs to inform policy decisions and supply planning.

Research – Focus research on adapting successful models of palliative care to fit the unique cultural, situational and socioeconomic context of LMICs, supporting research to ensure that service development fits the needs of the target populations, utilising validated person-centred and clinically relevant outcome measures to develop, evaluate, audit, cost and improve services.

Provision of Palliative Care – Improving access to palliative care services equitably for people of all ages, with particular attention to LMICs and vulnerable populations, establishing mechanisms to monitor and evaluate the availability and quality of services at all levels, to identify gaps in services, barriers to access and areas of improvement, reporting progress in each component of palliative care develop every two years to track changes since the World Health Assembly Resolution 67.19.

Prof Harding will discuss the findings of the report and proposed recommendations in detail on 14 November, the second day of the WISH 2024 summit at Qatar National Convention Centre in Doha.

Case study: Innovations in palliative care education for health professionals (excerpted from report)

Palliative care development at country and local levels depends largely on human resource availability. In the last decade, the emergence of Massive Open Online Courses (MOOCs) has expanded access to palliative care education for health professionals who otherwise would not have the opportunity. The End-of-Life Nursing Education Consortium in the US has educated more than 1.5 million nurses and allied health professionals in 114 countries in symptom assessment, management, and communication. This significantly improves palliative care knowledge and confidence in delivering care for attendees.

Similarly, the **Oman Cancer Association** offers a four-part palliative care program in a region where the quality of death index is the worst in the world. This program has taught more than 400 healthcare professionals from 12 countries in the Middle East and North Africa basic and advanced principles of palliative care delivery, leadership, and research. Also, the International Children’s Palliative Care Network’s e-learning program offers free pediatric palliative care training, and has been accessed by more than 15,000 health professionals from 191 countries.

About WISH

The theme of WISH 2024 is ‘Humanizing Health: Conflict, Equity and Resilience’, with the summit highlighting the need for innovation in health to support everyone, leaving nobody behind and building resilience, especially among vulnerable societies and in areas of armed conflict.

This year, WISH has entered a strategic partnership with the WHO – a partnership that involves collaboration in the development of a series of evidence-based reports and policy papers, as well as the support of WHO in a post-summit implementation strategy.



The summit features more than 200 experts in health speaking about evidence-based ideas and practices in healthcare innovation to address the world's most urgent global health challenges.