

## Dying At Home Week

“The most important conversation you’ve never had” was the tagline of the 2021 ‘Dying to Know’ social awareness campaign founded by the Groundswell Project ([more info at www.thegroundswellproject.com](http://www.thegroundswellproject.com)). The campaign highlights the lack of choice in how we die as a result of our hesitancy to bring up death in conversation and a subsequent lack of early planning. The statistic that even though most Australians don’t want or need to, 70% die in hospitals, is a direct result of this. In considering the barriers to talking about death and dying, Barwon Health social work and nursing staff in the Community Palliative Care team asked the question: How can we make starting the conversation less daunting for our staff and community members?

One answer harnessed music’s ability to increase accessibility through encouraging participation, fostering connection, and provide safety and containment. Staff engaged in a song competition to guess popular funeral songs in Australia as well as consider song choices for their own funeral. Armed with a palliative care sense of humour and a tip sheet on what to consider when choosing your funeral songs, the process helped to open up meaningful dialogues around dying. It also ignited discussions on their own life values and reminiscence on important moments captured in chosen songs. Realising the importance of those messages being left for loved ones highlighted the need to discuss preferences more broadly. Some memorable guesses in the popular funeral songs competition included Light My Fire by The Doors and Ding Dong the Witch is Dead!

The team also engaged the discussion at a community level with a week-long installation of a ‘Before I Die’ wall (pictured) in Lt. Malop Street. By-passers were asked to write onto the wall some bucket list ideas. Providing an accessible way-in to spark thinking about death and dying. Barwon Health Palliative Care staff and volunteers helped out during the week to encourage conversations at the wall and provide resources for continuing that conversation with their loved ones. Another community level response, increasing the visibility of the project, was creating campaign stickers which were stuck on coffee cups across Barwon Health cafes. The stickers had a QR code that took people to the Dying To Know website where accessible resources and further information was readily available.

Overall, there was an overwhelmingly positive response with staff and community members acknowledging that the discussion around death and dying is ordinarily something often put off or avoided. They appreciated the creative approaches taken, which showed the process of opening up dialogues on our own death and dying does not necessarily need to be a daunting one.



Pictured: Barwon Health Palliative Care volunteers engage community members at the Before I Die Wall in Little Malop Street as part of this year’s Dying to Know Campaign.

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## Meet our Community Palliative Care Staff Members

Hi I’m Annie Chatham and I have just started in the role of Volunteer Coordinator for the Palliative Care Program (in a 12 month position). I have a background in speech pathology working primarily in rehabilitation, and more recently I have been working with my husband in our small business. As a speech pathologist, the aspects of my job that I enjoyed most were being part of a team and working with clients to develop therapy programs in line with their own client centred rehabilitation goals. Working in our small business has expanded my skills in human resources, customer service, administration and budgeting and I have enjoyed the variety and challenges it has provided.

As 2021 rolled around I felt a yearning to return to working in healthcare and when I saw the Volunteer Coordinator position advertised I felt it would be a good fit for me. I think that being able to support others as they face a life limiting illness is a very special privilege, and I am really looking forward to working in a team again where patient centred goals take top priority.



I am aware I have big shoes to fill (taking over from Jennifer Walsh) but I am really looking forward to getting stuck into the role and meeting all the wonderful volunteers and staff involved in the Palliative Care Program. The last 12 months have been a roller-coaster for everybody, but the flexibility shown by all the volunteers, the ability to adapt to a covid safe way of working and the innovative plans that have been developed fill me with confidence that the year ahead will prove to be a very rewarding one.

On a personal note I am married with two teenage children and live on the beautiful Bellarine Peninsula. I spend a lot of my time running my children around to various commitments (thanks to covid I have been a bit quieter on this front!) I also enjoy a good series on Netflix/iview/SBS (hit me with your recommendations), daily walks/jogs along the beach with my dog Eddie and spending time with family and friends.

## LGBTIQ+ Inclusive Project Officer

The Palliative Care program is excited to announce that a new role has been added to the team: an LGBTIQ+ Inclusive Practice Project Officer. This is the first known LGBTIQ+ specific role at Barwon Health and has been fully funded by Hospice Foundation Geelong. The goals of this 12 month position will be multifaceted.

- examining the gaps and barriers that exist for LGBTIQ+ people with a life limiting illness,
- engaging the voices of LGBTIQ+ consumers in the Barwon Health catchment area,
- conducting a self-assessment of the Palliative Care Program against the Rainbow Tick Standards,
- developing and delivering LGBTIQ+ inclusive training to staff and volunteers,
- developing inclusive tools and resources for staff and volunteers,
- evaluating the cultural safety of the paperwork, policies, and procedures,
- developing a volunteer role to support those who identify as LGBTIQ+,
- implementing LGBTIQ+ inclusive end of life care practices.

Jen Walsh is the successful candidate and will commence the project in August. “This project is the first of many important steps towards improving access to culturally safe palliative care for members of the LGBTIQ+ community. The impact of the Barwon Health Palliative Care program supporting such a project is already being felt by local community members who have learned about the project. Yet again, Barwon Health is leading from the front. I’ve never seen a role of this kind in any other palliative care service. We have a real opportunity to improve the quality of life and quality of death for LGBTIQ+ people across the region – and lead the way for other palliative care services.”

This project is being launched with the support of Palliative Care Victoria and the Commissioner for LGBTIQ+ Communities. This has also already opened the door to a relationship with LGBTIQ+ Health Australia who is doing work in this space on a national level.

