

Submission  
No 45

**INQUIRY INTO CURRENT AND FUTURE PROVISION OF  
HEALTH SERVICES IN THE SOUTH-WEST SYDNEY  
GROWTH REGION**

**Organisation:** Southern Highlands Bereavement Care Service

**Date Received:** 28 May 2020

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May 2020

## **Submission to Upper House Inquiry into health service needs in the South West Sydney growth region**

The Southern Highlands Bereavement Care Service (SHBCS) provides specialist Bereavement Care Services that are inclusive, respectful and accessible for all members of the community, enhancing mental health, well-being and quality of life.

We offer bereavement counselling to individuals and families who are experiencing bereavement, divorce, terminal illness or other types of loss. Potential clients are encouraged to self-refer however we also welcome referrals from doctors, health and community professionals. A health care management plan is not required. We have a sliding scale of fees to ensure that bereavement counselling is available to all in the community regardless of financial situation. We also offer critical incident debriefing and educational workshops to organisations and schools within the district.

Our bereavement counselling service was originally set up by the Cancer Patients Assistance Society in conjunction with the Palliative Care and Oncology Service of the Bowral District and Community Services in May 1990. We are located within the grounds of Bowral Hospital, are a not for profit NGO funded by the South Western Sydney Local Health District (SWSLHD) and supplemented with contributions from our clients and donations from the community. We are a unique bereavement service and the only one of its kind within the region and indeed across NSW.

Our current funding level has facilitated us to provide specialist bereavement counselling and education services for the Wingecarribee and Wollondilly regions over the last 30 years with 2 part-time counsellors, an administrative assistant and a voluntary Management Committee composed of devoted community members.

*The SWSLHD has seen a growth in young families moving into the area, as well as an increasing ageing population, many of whom live outside of townships and experience varying degrees of social isolation. Our young people continue to struggle with increased changes and transitions that occur as a result of societal expectations, family breakdown, sudden death and suicide. **Aligning with preventative health strategies, and to ensure that the mental health needs of the region are met into the future, more bereavement counselling service hours are needed.***

## **Proposed current and future provision of Bereavement Services in order to meet the needs of a diverse and expanding population in the SWS growth region:**

- In line with future directions of SWSLHD, continue to contribute to the prospect of Integrated Health Neighbourhoods by expanding available grief and loss support services into the Macarthur region (where services of this kind are currently limited), thus decreasing the strain on community mental health and hospital services.
- Expand loss and grief services for vulnerable and ageing populations by providing support for people living with dementia, cancer, chronic health and life-limiting illnesses.
- Deliver specialist information, training and support to staff working in aged care facilities and disability services.
- Facilitate Carer health and well-being by promoting access to bereavement counselling and support at an earlier stage. Recent studies have shown that family members/Carers who have engaged in bereavement care and support before the death of their loved-one may have less complications in the grieving process after their loved-one has died. This is supported by a recent survey of Carers from South-West Sydney in 2018 showing that over 50% experienced high levels of psychological distress.
- Increase and expand loss and grief health promotion in schools, businesses and communities, via workshops, educational booklets and information that builds mental health, psychological strength, emotional capacity and resilience.

*Thank you for the opportunity to contribute this submission for your consideration,*

*Donna Barnard*

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*Funded by the South Western Sydney Local Health District*