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*Submission 14*

Dear Ms Cawcutt

The Heart Foundation welcomes the opportunity to provide comment to the Health and Community Services Committee parliamentary inquiry into Palliative care services and home and community care services in Queensland.

We represent the 60 000 Queenslanders who are living with heart failure<sup>i</sup> and as such have elected to respond to the terms of reference in relation to –

- Current capacity and adequacy of palliative care services and home and community care services for patients with heart failure
- Future needs of these services

Heart failure is a chronic, progressive and incurable condition caused by heart muscle damage from a heart attack. It occurs when the heart muscle becomes increasingly too weak to pump blood effectively throughout the body. Heart failure is a serious condition that has high mortality and distressing symptoms that can last and worsen for many months or years before people die. The eventual decline for a person with heart failure may not follow a predictable path and there may be difficulties anticipating the terminal phase.

While many palliative care programs focus on cancer patients, the associated high death rates and nature of heart failure indicate there is a need for quality palliative care services for this patient group. However, many people in Queensland who have heart failure are dying without the support of palliative care services to assist their end of life. This is due to a lack of availability of heart failure beds in acute hospital settings, as well as poorly funded and resourced services to support those who wish to die at home.

Queensland data from 2011 shows that 86% of all palliative care beds were allocated for people with cancer and only 3.4% to cardiovascular disease.<sup>ii</sup> This is inadequate to support the large and increasing number of Queenslanders dying from heart failure and also shows a failure of services to cope with the broader range of diseases necessitating palliative care. The Heart Foundation believes that the need for palliative care should not be dependent on a specific medical diagnosis but on the person's physical, emotional, spiritual and social needs.<sup>iii</sup> This is in line with the World Health Organization definition of palliative care which includes the care of patients facing any life-threatening illness.<sup>iv</sup>

People with heart failure are increasingly choosing to be cared for at home during the end stages of life, however palliative care services often don't have the capacity to care for heart failure patients. Inadequate funding, poor coordination of health services and a lack of clinical expertise in the trajectory of heart failure at the end of a patient's life are contributing factors which result in more avoidable hospital admissions and higher costs to the health system.

It is forecast that 10% of people over 65 will develop heart failure.<sup>v</sup> Combined with the projected growth in our ageing population, this will increase pressure on already strained palliative care services.

The Heart Foundation is calling for timely and appropriate access to multidisciplinary palliative care services for people with end stage heart failure, both in the hospital setting or in their own homes. These services need to be well integrated with treatment services in order to maximise quality of life and reduce avoidable hospital admissions.

Yours sincerely



Cameron Prout  
Chief Executive Officer

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<sup>i</sup> National Heart Foundation of Australia and the Cardiac Society of Australia and New Zealand (2011). (Chronic Heart Failure Guidelines Expert Writing Panel). Guidelines for the prevention, detection and management of chronic heart failure in Australia.

<sup>ii</sup> Palliative Care Outcomes Collaboration (2011). Outcomes in palliative care report, Queensland, January to June 2011. <http://www.pcoc.org.au/> (accessed 5 January 2012).

<sup>iii</sup> CareSearch Palliative Care Knowledge Network (2011). <http://www.caresearch.com.au/Caresearch.html> (accessed 5 January 2012).

<sup>iv</sup> World Health Organization website <http://www.who.int/cancer/palliative/definition/en/>

<sup>v</sup> Heart Foundation (2010). Multidisciplinary care for people with chronic heart failure. Principles and recommendations for best practice.