

# Understanding the importance of palliative care and how we can work together to advance this care in our communities

## Serving the seriously ill and those who care for them

While person-focused, or patient-centered, health care is not a novel concept, the health care industry's efforts to put it into practice are still in their early stages. However, the tide is turning as we look for ways to provide more personalized—and personal—attention to an aging and more culturally diverse population.

*As a result, interest is growing in palliative care: specialized medical and comfort care focused on providing patients relief from the symptoms, pain and stress associated with a serious or life-limiting illness.*

Although palliative care seeks to provide patients and loved ones with an approach that serves the whole person, significant barriers are making it difficult to provide these services effectively. The health care industry is fragmented with poor transitions between care settings—such as going from a hospital to a home or a long-term care facility. As a result, communication gaps make it difficult for patients to receive the care they need. In addition, patients are sometimes not referred often or quickly enough to palliative care resources that could have a dramatic effect on their quality of life.

## Answering the call—what can we do to address these challenges?

Closing these gaps calls for wider adoption of a new approach to palliative care—one that's not limited to end-of-life discussions and can co-exist with curative care. It must include a 360-degree approach that focuses on the patient and family, expanding access and engaging stakeholders at all levels.

**FOUR IN TEN**  
Americans have cared for a loved one with a serious condition.<sup>1</sup>



## A holistic approach:

- Puts a patient's physical, social and spiritual needs at the center of a care delivery plan to improve quality of life
- Expands access to care for patients, family members and caregivers
- Engages communities and policymakers
- Encourages investment in industry solutions



**The benefits of this approach for patients and caregivers:**

- Improves quality of care and survival as well as patient and family satisfaction<sup>2</sup>
- Reduces pain, suffering and distress among patients
- Improves communication among patients, families and care providers
- Addresses the needs of family caregivers as they care for a loved one
- Reduces unwanted, unnecessary and painful interventions

## Engaging all stakeholders in this important mission

You can be part of this important movement to provide more compassionate, person-focused care. Following are some specific ways that all stakeholders—from community leaders to legislators and employers—can assist in these efforts.

### **Community:**

Promote advance care planning and help change culture by bringing the palliative care conversation into the community

### **Policymakers:**

Identify palliative care educational opportunities and work to build bipartisan understanding regionally and nationally, as well as provide experience-based analysis of policy initiatives and engage with key public officials as requested

### **Employers:**

Encourage advance care planning among employees through integrated wellness programs

### **Providers:**

Explore new opportunities to develop and promote palliative care models through innovative partnerships and new hospital-based programs

To learn more about how you can engage in this important issue, please contact Peggy Maguire at [Peggy.Maguire@CambiaHealth.com](mailto:Peggy.Maguire@CambiaHealth.com) or Teresa Snell at [Teresa.Snell@CambiaHealth.com](mailto:Teresa.Snell@CambiaHealth.com).

<sup>1</sup> Cambia Health Foundation, National Journal survey

<sup>2</sup> "America's Care of Serious Illness: A State-by-State Report Card on Access to Palliative Care in Our Nation's Hospitals," Center to Advance Palliative Care, May 2011.