



**ACHIEVING THE PROMISE:  
UNIVERSAL ACCESS  
TO PALLIATIVE CARE**

**11 OCTOBER 2025**

**WORLD HOSPICE AND  
PALLIATIVE CARE DAY**

## **Press Release by the Palliative Care Association of Uganda (PCAU) on World Hospice and Palliative Care Day Commemoration 2025**

**Global Theme:** *Achieving the Promise: Universal Access to Palliative Care*

**Ugandan Theme:** *Amplifying Palliative Care Awareness through Introducing Palliative Care in Primary and Secondary Schools in Uganda*

**Today, Friday, October 10, 2025**, the Palliative Care Association of Uganda (PCAU) joins the global palliative care community to commemorate the World Hospice and Palliative Care Day (WHPCD). This day is an annual international event that unites people to raise awareness, celebrate, and mobilize support for hospice and palliative care worldwide. The day is an opportunity to highlight the importance of compassionate care for children and adults living with life-threatening illnesses that include Cancer, Heart Diseases, Chronic Respiratory Diseases, Kidney Failure, Neurological Conditions, Dementia, and Chronic Liver Disease, among others. **Palliative care** improves the quality of life for both patients and families by alleviating suffering and providing support.

Access to palliative care globally is still limited. According to recent Lancet Commission data, approximately 73 million individuals worldwide require palliative care each year. This includes nearly half of the 60 million people who pass away annually. Globally, only about 14% of the need is currently being satisfied, primarily in high-income nations, while low- and middle-income countries account for 80% of the need. The 2025 [APCA Atlas of Palliative Care in Africa reveals](#) that the continent has palliative care services that remain underdeveloped and essential medicines that are scarce, with poor integration into health systems. Moreover, insufficient training is constraining Africa's ability to address serious health-related suffering, which is affecting an estimated 17.6 million people per year, driven by a rapidly rising burden of non-communicable diseases (NCDs) and ageing populations.

The atlas shows Uganda leading African countries in developing palliative care programs, following the parameters and indications set by the World Health Organisation for global palliative care development. Since palliative care services were introduced in the country in 1993 by Dr. Anne Merriman, who established Hospice Africa Uganda, the country has progressively developed the service. Unlike in many African countries, in Uganda, health workers desiring to qualify in palliative care can attain a specialist Diploma, Degree, and Master's here. Uganda is also praised for the local reconstitution and distribution of oral liquid morphine, a medicine used to control moderate to severe pain, provided by government funding, allowing patients to access it free of charge. The

government has also established a division of palliative care at the Ministry of Health, which works closely with non-state actors and is coordinated by the Palliative Care Association of Uganda.

In Uganda, it is estimated that at least 500,000 people currently require palliative care, but only 11% receive access to pain relief and palliative care. Despite being recognized as a leader in palliative care on the African continent, Uganda continues to face challenges in ensuring equitable access, particularly in rural and underserved areas.

*“On this WHPCD 2025, the Palliative Care Association of Uganda (PCAU) appreciates all palliative care providers across the country who care for patients and their families in health facilities and in homes. We urge all stakeholders to support initiatives that improve access to palliative care, including better policies, improved government investment, access to essential medicines, and training for healthcare workers.”*  
Mark-Donald Mwesiga, Executive Director, PCAU

Some of the impending challenges to palliative care access in Uganda include the widespread lack of understanding of the concept among key stakeholders, such as leaders, patients, families, and the public, who could benefit from the approach. The country has yet to establish a national-level policy strategic framework to guide the programming and implementation of palliative care at all levels. The number of trained palliative care professionals is still limited to only 300 health facilities providing this form of care in 107 of the 146 districts, leaving out many places without a nearby health facility offering palliative care. Community health and public health approaches have yet to fully embrace palliative care, resulting in community and home-based services being scanty and only implemented by a few charitable stand-alone hospices and a limited number of private hospitals in Uganda. Evidence on the actual need is insufficient due to the low investment in palliative care research and low palliative care data collection and integration in national information systems. Yet the country is experiencing a rise in the incidence of non-communicable diseases and an aging population.

The global theme emphasising universal access to palliative care is therefore applicable to the real needs of Uganda. The World Health Organisation explains that the goal of Universal Health Coverage (UHC) is to ensure that everyone can obtain necessary health services without facing financial difficulties, thereby reducing the risk of poverty due to health-related expenses. Achieving UHC is therefore essential for improving health outcomes, promoting equity, and fostering economic growth. It requires strong health systems, adequate financing, and a commitment from governments and stakeholders to prioritize health as a human right.

Leaders at all levels need to understand that Palliative care today is a holistic approach to health care that focuses on improving the quality of life for people of all ages (adults and children) who are living with serious health-related suffering due to life-threatening or chronic illnesses. It addresses physical, psychological, social, and spiritual needs, ensuring that patients and their families receive compassionate support throughout the course of illness from diagnosis to end of life and into bereavement care. This understanding will dispel several myths and misconceptions surrounding the concept of palliative care.

To enhance understanding of palliative care, the Palliative Care Association of Uganda is collaborating with partners nationwide to introduce palliative care education and awareness in primary and secondary schools. In 2023, PCAU, working with the Ministry of Health, launched the first palliative club and compassionate community program in Uganda at Taibah International School. The initiative, which is intended to foster community empowerment and participation in palliative care, has now been rolled out in at least six leading regional schools. So far, over 1,500 students and teachers are engaged in this work, and PCAU is working to scale up this initiative. The schools and partners work closely with hospices where health workers continuously educate, mentor, and encourage compassionate practices for the sick and those who are grieving.

In palliative care provision, non-health professionals such as community volunteers, spiritual leaders, cultural and traditional leaders, students, caregivers, and community opinion leaders, among others, play essential roles when guided and empowered with information by professionals. To achieve universal access to palliative care, we urgently need to integrate palliative care into all aspects of health and social care delivery, from primary health care and community-based services for disease prevention to lower health facilities, district hospitals, regional referral Hospitals up to the tertiary level, or national specialized hospitals. We need to ensure we work with all institutions and actors, as they have roles to play. Schools are powerful advocates and agents of change within families and communities. Engaging children helps promote understanding of serious illnesses, as well as compassion and empathy, from an early age.

On this World Hospice and Palliative Care Day, let's all join hands to raise awareness and advocate for universal access to compassionate care during the event at Hospice Africa Uganda on Saturday, October 11, 2025. Key to this commemoration is launching the drive to amplify palliative care awareness by introducing Palliative Care education in Primary and Secondary Schools in Uganda.

We appeal to all actors to support and advocate for or provide palliative care services in their areas of reach, because quality palliative care within reach means compassion for all of us as a people.

**For more information, contact:**

Mark Donald Mwesiga, Executive Director,  
Palliative Care Association of Uganda (PCAU)

Email: [mark.mwesiga@pcau.org.ug](mailto:mark.mwesiga@pcau.org.ug)

Telephone: +256 785 884 205

The [Palliative Care Association of Uganda \(PCAU\)](#) is a national NGO and umbrella organization for all palliative care providers in Uganda, founded in 1999. PCAU consists of 35 member organizations and more than 1800 individuals. PCAU coordinates civil society efforts and works closely with the Ugandan government to integrate palliative care services into the country's healthcare system.