The proper care of the elderly is one of the greatest challenges of the 21st century. Single elderly women make up the highest percentage of the elderly population. Women often care for their partners until they pass away, leaving themselves without a social network that would prevent a move into a nursing home once they are in need of care. Many residents in nursing homes suffer from terminal illness and progressive diseases and a high proportion suffer from dementia.

HOSPICE AUSTRIA, the national organisation of more than 200 Hospice and Palliative Care Institutions, is planning and supporting the introduction of Hospice and Palliative Care into nursing homes throughout Austria. Hospice movement conducted 12 trials in one Austrian federal state (Vorarlberg) to test the implementation and development of such care in nursing homes.

The trials have brought to light the importance of coordinating all the different processes and training schemes within the organisation. Nursing homes need external expertise in hospice and palliative care not just for the care of the residents but at management and a developmental management level. Continuous training in palliative geriatrics should run alongside in order to ensure that training is kept up-to-date with new developments and remains sustainable into the future. This internal coordination and expansion will create a culture of palliative care within nursing homes.

Politically each federal state will be responsible for all aspects of implementing such hospice and palliative care in nursing homes, from finance to contents and regulation. The result of this coordination and cooperation between all the federal states will be a much greater understanding of the need for hospice and palliative care within nursing homes, so that the elderly can enjoy a high quality of life to the end of their days and are allowed to die with dignity.

HOSPICE AUSTRIA has developed guidelines for the implementation of hospice and palliative care in nursing homes which involves all connected persons and groups, as well as design for the actual and practical realization.

Under the supervision of HOSPICE AUSTRIA an advisory board was created in January 2009 consisting of representatives of Ministry of Health and Ministry of Social Affairs, the Austrian Medical Association, The national organizations of the nursing homes, the GÖG/ÖBIG (Austrian Health Institute) and ÖGAM (Association of General Practioners in Austria). The tasks of the advisory board is 1) to conduct the implementation of Hospice and Palliative Care in Austrian nursing homes, 2) to support the development, 3) to secure the quality and sustainability of the nursing homes, 4) to administrate the Austrian-wide certificate for Hospice and Palliative Care in nursing homes and 5) to give recommendations at the community, state and federal levels.