

VOLUNTARY ASSISTED DYING POSITION STATEMENT May 2018

BACKGROUND

Many attempts have been made to introduce 'voluntary assisted dying' (VAD) legislation (or 'voluntary euthanasia') in different Australian states and territories over a number of decades. Prior to 2017, most of these attempts have been unsuccessful, or where successful, in the Northern Territory and the Australian Capital Territory, were made invalid by the passage of overriding legislation by the federal parliament. However, in 2017, Victoria became the first state to pass VAD legislation, with the provisions for assisted dying expected to commence in 2019.

In New South Wales, the Parliamentary Working Group on Assisted Dying, through wide community consultation, developed the *Voluntary Assisted Dying Bill 2017* which was narrowly defeated by one vote, when it was debated in the Legislative Council on 16 November 2017. The chair of the working group, Trevor Khan MLC (The Nationals), has indicated that it will return to the issue after the NSW state election in March 2019. It may be, however, that the issue will have prominence in the election campaign, for some political parties, such as The Greens NSW and other VAD-focussed groups.

Cancer Voices NSW had not previously had an organisational position on voluntary assisted dying (or terms such as 'Voluntary euthanasia' that have been used in the past) until the Executive Committee decided in July 2017, consistent with its view that people with cancer have the right to understand all of the choices available to them, and therefore to advocate for greater choice for people with cancer in relation to their treatment options. Prior to this, it was always made clear that any opinion expressed by an individual connected to CVN was a personal one.

AIM

To contribute to the debate in NSW on voluntary assisted dying, leading to the passage of legislation that will provide a choice for those dying from cancer to make use of provisions for ending their life.

OBJECTIVES/STRATEGIES

- I. when and where appropriate, participate in the debate on voluntary assisted dying in NSW, emphasizing that adequate and timely palliative and end-of-life care remains central to the optimization of cancer treatment and care
- II. present Cancer Voices NSW's position on voluntary assisted dying in the media
- III. work with, and support, the work of organisations that have as their prime objective the achievement of assisted dying legislation in NSW

ACTIONS

- Provide input to the development of the Voluntary Assisted Dying Bill 2017 including, in July 2017, by making a submission to the Parliamentary Working Group on Assisted Dying
- Meet with decision makers and influencers within government to present specific issues regarding the need for enhanced choice for people with cancer in relation to voluntary assisted dying
- Identify opportunities to include a cancer consumer perspective in research about the need for voluntary assisted dying legislation
- Meet with appropriate organisations to support their work in furthering the debate on, and achievement of, improved patient choice in relation to voluntary assisted dying
- Monitor progress on the passage of voluntary assisted dying legislation in NSW and other states
- Contribute to the debate on voluntary assisted dying, from a cancer consumer perspective, in NSW (particularly in the context of the 2019 state election) and other states as it may affect NSW.

KEY RELATIONSHIPS

- NSW Parliamentary Working Group on Assisted Dying
- Dying With Dignity NSW
- Go Gentle Australia