

Submission into the Voluntary Assisted Dying Bill 2021

Submission No.: 916
Submitted by: Penny Tovey
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Position: I/We support the Voluntary Assisted Dying Bill
Comments in relation to: Other
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Submitter Comments:

My name is Penny Tovey and I'm writing to the Health and Environment Committee in support of the Voluntary Assisted Dying Bill 2021.

Last year, my husband Peter Simpson died after a long battle with melanoma. Peter was a giant in the trade union movement, where he was better known as "Simmo", and tirelessly advocated for the rights of workers and marginalised peoples alike. It is a sad truth that when Peter's time came to need help - to end his life when his suffering from the cancer became unbearable - Queensland's law abandoned him.

You will have heard enough stories like my late husband's now to know there is a need for this law. I want it on the record that I support this bill, and Peter would have too.

I also want this bill to be the very best it can be - and would like to draw your attention to an area I believe can be significantly improved: Permitting Telehealth to be used in the VAD assessment process. I understand this is currently blocked by Commonwealth law, but I urge the Committee to address this.

At the moment, this bill's prohibition of conducting any of the VAD eligibility assessments by phone - or anything other than in person - will pose a significant barrier to regional, rural and remote Indigenous communities.

Peter championed Indigenous rights and despised discrimination, but sadly I fear that is what the current ban on the use of Telehealth translates as; that people living in remote places will face additional barriers to accessing VAD, for no reason other than their postcode.

The proposed bill is strictly safeguarded, and rightly so. But let's not give terminally ill people additional hoops to jump through, in what is already a time-consuming and rigorous process to navigate.

This bill is our opportunity to improve on the bills passed in other states. Experiences of the Victorian law highlight the strain that is put on doctors having to travel to remote areas to conduct in-person assessments. We know we will face the same challenges in Queensland - so please, let's fix this now.

The ban on accessing VAD via Telehealth consultation is a significant hurdle for regional, rural and remote Indigenous communities to overcome, and an unnecessary barrier that means some dying people may not be able to access the choice they so sorely need.

I saw a placard at a recent rally outside Adelaide's Parliament House, ahead of them passing their own VAD law. It said 'Dying is hard enough, don't make it any harder'. That was certainly true of Peter's experience. Please keep this sentiment in mind as you consider this bill.

Thank you for your time in reading my submission.