

Submission into the Voluntary Assisted Dying Bill 2021

Submission No.: 1197

Submitted by: Name withheld

Publication: Making the submission public but withholding your name

Position: I/We support the Voluntary Assisted Dying Bill

Comments in relation to: Eligibility criteria* ,The request and assessment process,Safeguards,Conscientious objection by either individuals or entities

Attachments: See attachment

Submitter Comments:

Submission to Health and Environment Committee re Voluntary Assisted Dying Bill 2021

Introduction

This is a very good bill. It is compassionate and fair. It is voluntary so no one has to do what they do not want to do. While I agree it has a lot of safeguards in place, I worry that having too many safeguards may make the process too onerous for someone who is dying and suffering. Do not make amendments that increase safeguards! That would be completely unnecessary.

Probably all dying and suffering people will use palliative care so Queensland needs world's best practice palliative care as well. The few that go on to avail themselves with VAD will also use palliative care. Unfortunately, it is well known and acknowledged by most professional bodies that palliative care cannot relieve the suffering of all at the end of life.

Time to death requirement

I do not understand the need for a 12 month time-frame for expectation of death. These people have gone through their treatment and palliative care, so they will know exactly where they stand and so will their health practitioners. All reasonable hope has gone and now they just want to die in peace and on their own terms before their dignity disappears completely. Personal stories from around the world that I have heard and read, show that people tend to hold off until they cannot bear the suffering any longer.

All I can think of is that maybe doctors need some sort of guideline on time to death given that the prognostic process tends to be not very accurate for a cohort of one.

Victorian and Western Australian parliaments decreased their parliamentary inquiries recommended time-frames of 12months to 6 months. That would be again an unnecessary additional safeguard for the proposed Queensland legislation and it would mean some people would be unfairly excluded based on an inaccurate prognosis.

Doctor initiated discussion

The Qld proposed bill takes a sensible and adult position about doctor initiated VAD discussion. The Victorian legislation is just odd. It places some sort of weird taboo on speaking about death and dying. This is a cringe worthy hangover from 20th century

attitudes to death. As for it being a safeguard, what nonsense! It will just result in discrimination against the vulnerable, and the culturally and linguistically diverse who struggle already to get good and balanced health information.

Specialist in the disease

A major mistake of Victoria's legislation is the requirement that the coordinating practitioner or consulting practitioner be a specialist in a specific disease. This has not worked in Victoria. It has caused great distress for those dying and suffering who want to access VAD due to the delays it causes. This problem would be substantially worse in Queensland with its remote geography and indigenous populations. Do not even think about changing this improvement in the Qld bill over the Victorian bill.

Entity conscientious objection

How can an entity have a conscience? What nonsense! This is conceding to the elephant in the room which is religion. Polls show us that the majority of people of religion or faith support VAD. So even in religious entities that purport not to support VAD, there will be a majority of individuals who do support it. This law is about individuals and not things. VAD is a basic human right and entities are not humans.

However, I think we do need a harmonious society. So to that end, I think the bill, which goes to great lengths to accommodate these non-human entities, does so fairly. I support this part of the proposed bill but I would be most upset if it was watered down.

VAD is not suicide

It is clear that voluntary assisted dying is not suicide. I am relieved that the proposed bill acknowledges this. This part of the proposed legislation must be preserved. It would be a grave insult to people for whom death is their only outcome, for legislation to state they have suicided. Their death certificate should not have any annotation about VAD and insurance companies must not alter payouts based on anyone accessing VAD.

Commonwealth Carriage Service Laws

It is disappointing that some doctors and health workers may feel intimidated by the Commonwealth Carriage Service laws that were originally enacted for a completely different reason. This is particularly important in respect to Queensland's geographical remoteness.

Conclusion

I not only support this Voluntary Assisted Dying bill but I would take a very dim view of any changes that would water down its intent. It is a good bill as it stands.