

Submission to the **Health and Environment Committee** on the introduction of the “Voluntary Assisted Dying Bill 2021”

Overview

I strongly reject the introduction of this bill as I feel there is no legitimate reason for a civilised society to seek ways to enable the taking of life. Every life is important and should be treated with care and compassion. The measure of a civilised society is the care we take for each other.

1. Palliative Care as an option

The Principles listed in Division 2 subsection 5 (d) discuss the importance of high quality care and treatment including palliative care. It is not right to offer euthanasia to the dying and vulnerable when so many are already missing out on the care they require and dying in pain as a result. Euthanasia will not give real choice when many Queenslanders do not have access to palliative care. Real choice is provided by proper palliative care. There is no requirement for a patient to be seen by a palliative care specialist.

“People need to be kept comfortable in their dying times, and it’s not by Voluntary Assisted Dying. It’s by Palliative Care. So, I think they [the Government] should step up now and spend the money” – Dr. Chris Perry.

This legislation does nothing to provide more access to palliative care.

2. **Eligibility and process** – The Bill allows for anyone with a terminal disease and up to a 12 month prognosis to request euthanasia. The process from first request to provision of lethal prescription can occur within 9 days. No decision should be made that quickly. There should at least be some cooling off period between diagnosis of the disease and the request for euthanasia.

3. **Medical assessment** – There is no requirement for specialist examination in the area of the patients suffering. The two approving doctors can be junior General Practitioners with little or no specialised training in end-of-life management. Surely more than one specialist opinion on the prognosis should be required before such a drastic decision to end a life is contemplated.

The Australian Medical Association and the Nurses Professional Association of Queensland are both opposed to euthanasia and assisted suicide.

4. **Mental Health** – There is no requirement for those requesting assisted suicide to be assessed by a mental health expert yet mental anguish and depression is often one of the main drivers for requests for euthanasia. Anyone diagnosed with a terminal illness is likely to suffer from some form of mental anguish.

5. **No conscientious objection** – If a medical professional has a conscientious objection to euthanasia, they must still provide the patient with information about someone who does support euthanasia. An aged care facility provided by an organisation whose values do not support euthanasia, must still provide access to medical and other staff providing euthanasia to their residents. This makes them part of the process whether they want to or not.

6. Possibilities of abuse

Many elderly Queenslanders are abused, mistreated, and taken advantage of by the very people who are supposed to take care of them. Elder abuse and “inheritance impatience” is real, underreported and would be further encouraged by euthanasia laws.

Queenslanders with a disability are particularly vulnerable to pressure, neglect, and abuse regardless of so called current “safeguards”. Disability groups are condemning this legislation.

One of the most vulnerable sectors of our community – indigenous Queenslanders – have not been consulted on the matter.

7. Personal story

My mother was diagnosed with Alzheimer’s disease and I was her carer for 5 years until she died at home with her family around her. The supporting care provided by an agency and the advice of the palliative care nurse shortly before she died enabled me to keep her at home where she was comfortable and loved. Was caring for her difficult? Yes. Was it inconvenient? Yes. I believe sacrifices we make for the ones we love are refining and strengthening in character and provide us to prove we are human and much better than the animals.

Sincerely

Carolyn Haynes

██
██
██