



NT Voluntary Euthanasia Society Inc

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Newsletter

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AROUND AUSTRALIA

TASMANIA

After the recent Tasmanian election, in a House of 25 seats, 13 MPs are supportive of voluntary assisted dying legislation.

- 1) 5 MPs voted for the Voluntary Assisted Dying Bill on 24 May 2017.
- 2) Five more say they support VAD in principle and are likely to vote for a bill similar to the 2016 bill.
- 3) Two more MPs expressed support in principle at the time of the 24 May 2017 debate and repeated that support in their election survey response to the Australian Christian Lobby.
- 4) One new MP (Anita Dow) responded to the Council on the Ageing: "The Tasmanian Labor Party supports Tasmanians' choice to die with dignity. In 2017, a Voluntary Assisted Dying Bill which was co-sponsored by Shadow Attorney General Lara Giddings was introduced into the Parliament. While this bill was defeated Labor supports Tasmanians to have a choice about their end of life options.

Dying with Dignity Tasmania believes the next Bill gives them their best chance yet to pass legislation.

QUEENSLAND

Queensland is trying to catch up with the rest of Australia by putting a VE bill to the state parliament early next year. This is a big learning experience for Dying with Dignity Queensland who hope to be successful. The Queensland government has only one House (no Senate) so proceeding could be easier than it has been in other states. DWDQ will be drawing heavily on the lessons learnt in Victoria and the other states that have come so close to being successful.

WESTERN AUSTRALIA

On 23 August 2017, the Western Australian Parliament established a Joint Select Committee of the Legislative Assembly and Legislative Council to inquire and report on the need for laws in Western Australia to allow citizens to make informed decisions regarding their own end of life choices.

Chair of the Joint Select Committee on End of Life Choices, Amber-Jade Sanderson, said the inquiry is an important opportunity for all Western Australians to have their views heard on an issue that affects everyone. “There is demand within our community for this issue to be examined. We want to give everyone the chance to engage in a process that will explore a range of views and consider proposals for the future”, Ms Sanderson said. “Cross-party select committees can achieve great outcomes by working cooperatively and I genuinely hope for that in this process. Although this issue is challenging and contentious, there are principles that we all share: respect for the rights and freedoms that our society provides us and the ability for us to hold fundamentally different views, and compassion for those who are nearing the end of their lives, particularly those suffering under a medical condition that will shorten their lives.”

The Committee will –

- (a) assess the practices currently being utilised within the medical community to assist a person to exercise their preferences for the way they want to manage their end of life when experiencing chronic and/or terminal illnesses, including the role of palliative care;
- (b) review the current framework of legislation, proposed legislation and other relevant reports and materials in other Australian States and Territories and overseas jurisdictions;
- (c) consider what type of legislative change may be required, including an examination of any federal laws that may impact such legislation; and
- (d) examine the role of Advanced Health Directives, Enduring Power of Attorney and Enduring Power of Guardianship laws and the implications for individuals covered by these instruments in any proposed legislation.

The Committee initially invited written submissions and are currently holding their public hearings. The Committee is expected to deliver its findings by 23 August 2018, paving the way for a free parliamentary vote on voluntary assisted dying which could happen before the end of 2018. If a voluntary assisted dying law passed in the Western Australian Parliament, it would become the second Australian state to do so. Victoria passed their assisted dying legislation late last year; the legislation is expected to start operating by mid-2019, open to terminally ill adults who have lived in the state for at least 12 months.

NEW SOUTH WALES

After a marathon debate that ran all of Thursday (16 November 2017) and ended at nearly midnight, the bill to legalise voluntary assisted dying failed to pass the New South Wales' Upper House by a single vote.

With 19 voting in support but 20 against, the result came down to the wire. MPs were given a conscience vote on the legislation, introduced by Nationals MP Trevor Khan, which would allow terminally ill patients over the age of 25 to end their own lives with the help of doctors.

Mr Khan said last night he was "obviously disappointed" with the vote but pledged to keep pushing for the legislation.

"We had what I think is a reasonable expectation that we'd just get over the line [but] obviously we fell short by one," he said. "[But] we'll continue to talk with the stakeholders, and work out a timing and a campaign. It's clear that there's a lot of community support for this. It really needs that campaign to continue and we'll get over the line in due course."

Mr Khan said he would look to reintroduce a bill in the next term of Parliament.

The conditions in the assisted dying legislation:

Proposed patients must be over the age of 25 and would be expected to die within 12 months due to their illnesses

They must be assessed by a psychologist or psychiatrist and have their decision signed off on by two medical practitioners, including a specialist

Close relatives can challenge patient eligibility in the Supreme Court

During debate on Thursday, MPs made many emotional pleas for and against euthanasia.

Nationals MP Bronnie Taylor, who has worked as a palliative care nurse, said terminally ill patients should not have to suffer. "Why do we not give them the option to end their lives in a time of their choosing?"

Labor MP Penny Sharpe agreed, saying patients should be given the right to choose. "The status quo is failing to provide the support, compassion and care that our fellow humans need."

But Christian Democrat Fred Nile said legalisation was a dangerous move. "How will such a bill, once passed, impact on how we see value in life?" he said.

Liberal backbencher Taylor Martin argued euthanasia was comparable to reintroducing the death penalty. "One of the main reasons why Australia stopped the barbaric practice of capital punishment is because it is so final," he said. "We must consider this bill through a similar lens."

ACT and NT

The ACT Chief Minister Andrew Barr and NT Chief Minister Michael Gunner, both from the Labor Party, have recently signed a memorandum of understanding on a number of joint policy priorities including removal of the 'The Andrews Bill'. Barr explained that "The Territories are unique, and joining forces will combine our strengths as self-governing territories." Andrew Barr MLA told media on 9 February 2018 that "With the Victorian government now moving to implement voluntary euthanasia laws, the situation where the Australian Territories aren't able to even consider our own reforms is absurd".

Perhaps in anticipation of new Federal laws to overturn the ban on the ACT Parliament making its own VAD laws, a Select Committee on End of Life Choices was established by the ACT's Legislative Assembly in November 2017. The Committee is currently undertaking its review and will provide a report to Parliament by 29 November 2018. If the Committee reports in favour of introducing a VAD scheme for the ACT, this may prompt the Federal Government to restore Territory rights to enable them to make VAD laws.

SOUTH AUSTRALIA

South Australia's recent election is not good news for the South Australian Voluntary Euthanasia Society. The Lower House now has 20 who support VAD, 21 against and 6 unknowns. And many of the unknowns are a bit ambitious - more likely to vote no.

NTVES AGM

The AGM is to be held on Saturday 11th August 2018. Please renew your membership before the meeting.