



NT Voluntary Euthanasia Society Inc

GPO Box 2734 Darwin NT 0801

Phone: 8945 1446

Patron: Mr Marshall Perron

President: Mrs Judy Dent

Member of World Federation of Right to Die Societies

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Newsletter

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MAID IN CANADA

On February 6, 2015, the Supreme Court of Canada struck down the ban on medical assistance in dying (MAID) for patients meeting specific eligibility requirements. The Court held that the ban deprived people suffering from grievous and irremediable medical conditions of the right to life, liberty and security of the person. On June 17, 2016, the Federal Parliament of Canada passed Bill C-14, establishing the legislation to regulate the practice of MAID.

Recently, Minister of Justice David Lametti's office indicated that the government is determined to re-introduce changes to MAID legislation once Parliament resumes and was quoted as saying "Our government has every intention of meeting the court's deadline." This was welcome news, given that changes to MAID legislation have already been delayed twice since the Truchon decision (another court case, this one telling the government to make changes to Bill C-14.) Discussions with stakeholders across Canada and nearly 300,000 responses to an online questionnaire indicate Canadians want more access to MAID. This was the largest number of responses the Justice Department had ever received during a public consultation. Dying With Dignity Canada welcome this news as they hear every day from those who are continuing to suffer because of their inability to access MAID under the current legislation.

Recently, many were saddened to see the case of X and Y, a Nova Scotia couple who ended up in court over X's decision to access MAID. X was found eligible for MAID under the current law which is both his constitutional right and an individual choice. It is tragic that X has continued to suffer and face barriers to accessing MAID as a result of a series of challenges and appeals by Y. Near the end of September, the Nova Scotia Court of Appeals reserved their judgement – leaving X continuing to suffer while he awaits their decision. What this case should remind everyone is that it's critical to have end-of-life discussions with loved ones and family members today.

GAFFNEY TABLES TASMANIAN VAD BILL

The Upper House began debate on the Bill, the fourth of its kind to be considered in Tasmania, on 15 September.

Gaffney says the legislation, at 157 pages, is far more detailed and considered than previous bills. It has been formulated with the assistance of the Office of Parliamentary Counsel, whose functions include helping to draft, amend and prepare proposed legislation.

Gaffney has consulted widely on the makeup of the Bill, and has drawn extensively on evidence from jurisdictions where VAD laws have been working safely and as intended for many years.

Opinion polls show overwhelming support for the right of a competent and eligible adult to access an assisted death. In 2017, the last time an assisted dying bill was considered in the parliament, a Roy Morgan poll found 85% support for the question 'Should a doctor be allowed to give a patient a lethal dose?' The figure reflects similar levels of support for voluntary assisted dying in other Australian states and territories.

The Mercury newspaper recently published a rundown of the proposed legislation, including interviews with Gaffney, and Jacqui and Natalie Gray, the Tasmanian sisters who have spearheaded Tasmania's VAD campaign since the death of their mother Diane from cancer in 2019.

On 19 August, the sisters and Greens leader Cassy O'Connor tabled in parliament a petition of 13,082 signatures in favour of legalising VAD – a record number for a petition in the state.

Public support for legalising voluntary assisted dying has been growing steadily over the past two decades. A poll by the Mercury in 1998 found 54 per cent of respondents supported such legislation, 34 per cent opposing, and the rest undecided.

A poll in 2013 found 80 per cent of Tasmanians believed there should be a change in the law to allow voluntary assisted dying.

And in 2017, the last time a voluntary assisted dying bill was introduced to Tasmanian parliament, a Roy Morgan poll found 87 per cent of Australians in favour of “letting patients die when they are hopelessly ill and experiencing unrelievable suffering with no chance of recovery”.

In this same survey, 92 per cent of Tasmanians believed it was OK for a doctor to allow a terminally ill and suffering patient to die, and 85 per cent of Tasmanians believed a doctor should be allowed to administer a lethal dose if it was requested by a dying patient.

But while the in-principle support is unarguably strong in the community, this does not necessarily mean easy passage for a bill through parliament.

Gaffney's main concern was building as many safeguards into the legislation as possible, to alleviate concerns about people's lives being ended against their will, and to ensure the eligibility criteria were as specific as possible.

"I've seen one argument from someone that 'if this is legal, my friend with depression will be able to take her own life' and, well, no, they won't, that's not how this will work," he says.

"Opponents of voluntary assisted dying use this slippery slope argument all the time, saying it will lead to some kind of rush of people using it, and it's just not true.

"In other places where these laws are in effect, it simply doesn't happen.

"In Canada, over 70 per cent of the people who are eligible to access voluntary assisted dying do not choose it, but it provides a mental health benefit simply because people know the option is there and they won't be left to suffer intolerably.

"And in Victoria, there were 52 deaths under that legislation in the first six months of it being in effect, out of something like 6.5 million people in the state. That would be the equivalent of perhaps four people in Tasmania, which is hardly the open floodgates some people are scared of."

Opposition Leader Rebecca White says it is a complex issue that provokes strong opinions but that the Labor Party supports the principle of allowing people to choose voluntary assisted dying.

"Where there are appropriate safeguards in place to protect vulnerable people, an individual should have the right to choose this option in consultation with their doctor and their family," White says.

"We will carefully review the Bill in its final form when it is tabled, with a particular focus on ensuring it contains appropriate safeguards to protect the most vulnerable in our community."

But Gaffney's biggest concern with his own legislation is that he might have made it too hard for people to meet the eligibility requirements, and his final draft includes several pages of amendments tightening up these criteria.

He says it is important to remember that now, in the absence of any legislation to legalise voluntary assisted dying, suicides already occur.

"Sometimes terminally ill people do find other ways to end their own lives without medical assistance," he says.

"For some people the only thing they can do is to refuse all treatment, refuse food and water, and essentially starve themselves to speed up the illness and hasten death.

“And of course it’s already legal for painkillers to be administered in higher and higher doses, until you become unconscious and that can happen without your consent, so what’s happening now is not perfect either.”

Vatican Strips Belgian Group of ‘Catholic’ label

Sunday, May 17, 2020

The Vatican has put its foot down on a Belgian Catholic group over euthanasia and has declared that it can no longer be considered “Catholic”. The Brothers of Charity, a religious congregation founded in the 19th century, runs 15 highly-respected psychiatric hospitals. In 2017, the board of the organization’s hospitals, which was composed on 12 lay people, including former Christian Democrat Prime Minister Herman Van Rompuy, along with three brothers of the congregation, decided to permit doctors to practice euthanasia in the hospitals.

The Catholic Church strictly forbids euthanasia. However, the board refused to buckle under pressure from the Church to manage the hospitals with a Catholic spirit. "In spite of the three years of dialogue, the vision of those in charge of the organisation has unfortunately remained unchanged", laments Brother René Stockman, Superior General of the Brothers of Charity in Rome. "It is contrary to the doctrine of the Church."

AGM 15 August 2020

At the recent AGM, the following office bearers were elected:

<i>President</i>	Judy Dent
<i>Vice-President</i>	Robyn Harrison
<i>Secretary</i>	E A (Janie) Mason
<i>Treasurer</i>	Shirley McKerrow
<i>Public Officer</i>	Shirley McKerrow

NTVES thanks Copytime in Edmunds St, Darwin for remaining open to enable printing of this newsletter as usual in these trying times of the COVID pandemic.