

MY LIFE MY CHOICE

A newsletter produced for the dominant purpose of educating and raising awareness of the need for voluntary assisted dying law reform in Queensland — No.25 June 2021

COUNTDOWN STARTS



Jos Hall
President
Dying With Dignity
Queensland

After decades of fighting for voluntary assisted dying laws, their fate will now be decided literally in a matter of weeks.

In the past few years we have welcomed the commitment by Premier Anastacia Palaszczuk to hold an inquiry into VAD, the inquiry's recommendation for VAD laws, and the drafting of a VAD Bill by the independent Queensland Law Reform Commission.

The VAD Bill – now the subject of public feedback by the cross-party parliamentary Health Committee – reflects the best features of VAD laws enacted elsewhere in Australia and overseas. It should be adopted as it stands.

We need to tell that to our MPs and the Health Committee before the Bill returns to Parliament for debate on 14 September.

That means we have just weeks to convince our 93 state MPs to pass the VAD Bill as drafted. They will be given a conscience vote so they will not be bound by their party's specific policy on voluntary assisted dying.

But we should not forget, and we must not let them forget, that although any vote on a VAD Bill will be a conscience vote, this law is not about them.

It is about us as individual Queenslanders who simply want a wider choice at the end of life. It is our law.

So even if any MP may not wish to ever access VAD for themselves, that should not prevent them from voting for the Bill.



All MPs need to get that message and all VAD advocates need to deliver it to them.

But, we have just a matter of weeks to make our views and our expectations crystal clear.

PASS THIS BILL

Dying With Dignity Queensland believes the VAD Bill should be passed in its current form as drafted by the independent Queensland Law Reform Commission.

We urge all members and supporters to tell the Health Committee to recommend the QLRC's Bill to State Parliament.

Make a personal submission to the Committee by [visiting its website](#).

Tell them you want the VAD Bill passed as is! The deadline is 9.00am Friday 2 July so.....

Do it NOW!

YOU

**MUST HELP PASS
YOUR VAD LAW!**

The lower house of the South Australian Parliament just recently voted to support a VAD Bill and the state's upper house is expected to have the final say in a week or so. (pictured)

In that vote MPs from all parties spoke in favour of voluntary assisted dying and the need for South Australians to have the opportunity to choose VAD at the end of life or not.

We want to see the same scene played out in our State Parliament when the VAD Bill is debated in the coming months.

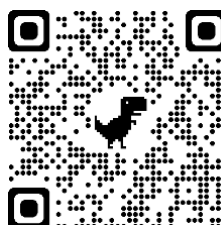
But until then all of us who are VAD advocates need to make sure our 93 state MPs get the message that we want them to vote for VAD.

It's a simple message for you to give them: "It's my life, it's my choice, and I want my law."



**TELL YOUR
STATE
MP.....**

IT'S **MY LIFE**
IT'S **MY CHOICE**
AND I WANT **MY LAW**



INSIDE THIS EDITION:

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Christians can help secure VAD

Join the campaign for compassion

Queenslanders seeking better choices at the end of life must realise that time is rapidly running out to do their part in having our 93 state MPs pass voluntary assisted dying laws.

The Queensland Parliament's Health Committee is examining the VAD Bill drafted by the independent Queensland Law Reform Commission, and MPs will start to debate it from 14 September.

So we have only a matter of weeks to get our message to them that we want them to vote for VAD.

I plan to work ceaselessly through my new group Christians for Voluntary Assisted Dying Queensland and as part of the My Life My Choice coalition to see the Bill passed.

I urge you to join me in achieving this by following my new Facebook page and letting me know if you are willing to contact your MP to secure their vote for VAD.

As an Elder of my Church for 62 years I will be concentrating on Christian issues in the public debate about the Bill.

I know that the leaders of many churches have issued statements opposing the legislation but I am absolutely certain that most Christians disagree with them.

Reputable market research repeatedly shows around three out of every four Queenslanders support VAD laws.



Everal Compton
Christians for
Voluntary Assisted
Dying – Queensland

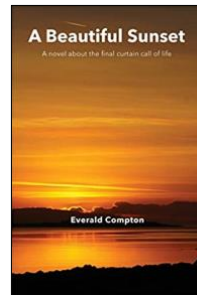
In addition to asking MPs to support the VAD Bill I have written a novel, *A Beautiful Sunset*,

It's the story of several people facing their own mortality and weighing the issues connected to voluntary assisted dying.

In addition to exploring VAD arguments, if you buy *A Beautiful Sunset* you will be supporting our VAD campaign.

I am giving 50% of the royalties from the book to Dying With Dignity Queensland to help support their efforts to secure VAD laws.

So if you want to help please go to my website www.everalcompton.com and click on the book title which will lead



'I know that the leaders of many churches have issued statements opposing the legislation but I am absolutely certain that most Christians disagree with them.'

you to an order form which you can complete and send to me.

I look forward to your support in this vital campaign that will benefit all Queenslanders.



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Bishop's incorrect claims answered

North Queensland Catholic Bishop Tim Harris again entered the VAD debate recently with a letter in the *Townsville Bulletin* riddled with misinformation to support his arguments against giving Queenslanders better end-of-life choices. Ian Wood from [Christians Supporting Choice for Voluntary Assisted Dying](#) was quick to answer Bishop Harris's misleading letter.

A Christian response to Catholic Bishop Harris

Townsville Bulletin 4 June 2021

Bishop Harris states: VAD "laws will result in more deaths". Fact: these patients are already dying – there will not be any more deaths, just less horrific suffering as that life ends.

Fact: While there will always be a place for good palliative care – no amount of money or advancements will ever provide the required level of relief of all suffering. Harris quotes Paul Keating against VAD Choice!

Fact: What on earth are Keating's qualifications to allow him to pontificate on how other

Australians should suffer and die?

Harris states: "Society will never be the same again". I imagine a similar remark was made at the end of the Catholic Inquisition, with the abolition of slavery and when women were allowed to have pain relief during childbirth!

Hopefully we can say the same when there are no longer any paedophile priests?

Fact: A significant majority of Australians have stopped, have

thought rationally, and decided that a change in our society is needed to allow the option to choose a voluntary assisted death.

Bishop Harris is welcome to maintain his medieval outlook on dying but how dare he try to impose his views on all other Australians, including a majority of Christians.

Ian Wood
National Spokesperson
Christians Supporting Choice
for Voluntary Assisted Dying

MPs should fully back the Bill

Sensible improvements on other state laws

The Queensland VAD Bill, carefully crafted by the Queensland Law Reform Commission (QLRC), mirrors the Bills passed in Victoria, Western Australia, and Tasmania with some improvements in fairness to access by terminally ill Queenslanders.

The Bill – now subject to public scrutiny and feedback by the parliamentary Health and Environment Committee – also takes into account the decentralised nature and size of the state of Queensland.

The most obvious improvement is the requirement of a prognosis of one period only – of 12 months until death – rather than two periods of six months and 12 months tied to the nature of a person's life-ending disease.

As reasoned by the QLRC, having one period avoids any discrimination against terminally ill persons who suffer from one disease rather than another. It also avoids issues of ambiguity and contention where diseases might overlap, and gives more time and certainty for terminally ill people to action their end-of-life planning.

Queensland and Western Australia both face the tyranny of distance in their vast States and have accordingly made arrangements for the engagement of nurses practitioners under appropriate supervision of qualified doctors to ensure that terminally ill persons in remote areas will have access to VAD close to home.



David Muir
Chair
The Clem Jones

Sensibly both Queensland's draft law and the Western Australian VAD Act also provide a caveat to the embargo on medical practitioners initiating discussion on voluntary assisted dying to allow this on the proviso that all other options are discussed at the same time.

This is fair to both doctors and patients as doctors ought not to have their hands tied in giving advice and patients are entitled to know all their options.

'The Bill has all the usual safeguards and is guided by the usual principles of dignity, fairness and autonomy with full recognition of the role of palliative care'

The Queensland Bill gives the right of conscientious objection to medical practitioners as well as institutions, but does forbid any institution from denying their permanent residents access to their own medical practitioners to administer VAD.

This also applies to non-permanent residents when the medical advice is that they should not be moved to achieve that purpose. These prohibitions are critical to the welfare of the terminally ill.

Otherwise their wishes could be thwarted by the institution in which they reside.

This is especially true for permanent residents who are in their home and the great Aussie sense of a fair go is captured by the saying that 'a man's home is his castle'.

The Queensland bill in its entirety ought to be supported by Queensland MPs as it has been deeply researched with the benefit of experience, particularly from Victoria.

The Bill should not be seen as an ambit claim prone to being amended.



The Bill has all the usual safeguards and is guided by the usual principles of dignity, fairness and autonomy with full recognition of the role of palliative care.

Any MP thinking of moving amendments to the Bill needs to consider whether they might be taking a hammer to the fingers of the terminally ill as they grasp for access to VAD in their hour of most need.

Liberal MP backs territory VAD rights

A federal Liberal Party MP has expressed his support for scrapping laws preventing the Northern Territory and the ACT from enacting voluntary assisted dying laws.

The Member for the Melbourne seat of Goldstein, Tim Wilson, said he supported VAD in principle and did not believe the Federal Parliament should override the legislative rights of the ACT and NT.

Mr Wilson, a former Human Rights Commissioner, was speaking to a motion put forward by Andrew Leigh, the Labor MP for the Canberra-based seat of Fenner.

Mr Leigh's motion called on the



Leigh



Wilson



Smith

federal government to scrap the *Euthanasia Laws Act 1997* which was passed to overturn the NT's pioneering VAD law, the *Rights of the Terminally Ill Act 1995*.

"The world is a very different place from when in 1997 this parliament determined to take away the power to legislate over euthanasia from the ACT and the

Northern Territory," Mr Leigh said.

"Those jurisdictions were young then. They are mature assemblies now. Back then, no state had moved [on VAD laws]. Now, half the states have moved.

"We know that this is a challenging topic for many, but regardless of where you stand on the merits of

euthanasia, it is untenable that the territories should be prevented from debating an issue which is being debated in every Australian state," Mr Leigh said.

The Labor Party MP representing another ACT-based seat, David Smith the Member for Bean, said he personally opposed VAD.

But he said because the Commonwealth had recognised self-government in the ACT and NT it shouldn't "pick and choose" on what issues the two jurisdictions should be blocked from making their own laws.

Debate on Mr Leigh's motion was adjourned.

VAD Bill serves all Queenslanders

Exhaustive process delivers world-class legislation

Claims by those opposed to VAD that Queensland VAD Legislation is poorly conceived and is being rushed are both false and deceitful.

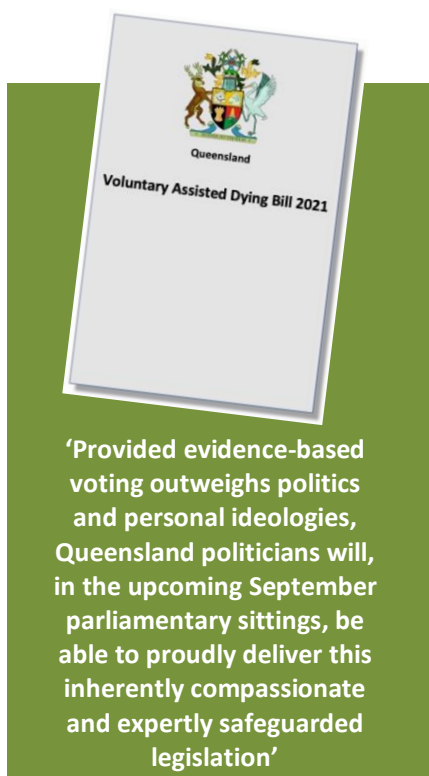
The draft Queensland VAD Bill is an extensively researched and evidence-based document following an exhaustive three-year process involving the statewide Parliamentary Health Committee Inquiry and further in-depth work by the independent Queensland Law Reform Commission.

Both bodies sought and received wide-ranging expert and public testimony.

The Bill, which can now only be voted upon by our 93 elected state MPs, addresses the needs of a small but genuinely deserving group of our society – terminally ill people with full mental capacity who, when faced with inevitable death, intolerable suffering and loss of dignity, will have the legal right to self-control over timing and their end of life circumstances.

The legislation also serves the vast majority who hope never to have the need to seek access to VAD, but who would like the choice if it were necessary. By its voluntary nature, it also serves those who would not choose VAD for themselves but respect the choice of others.

It clearly defines the transparent mandated steps through which doctors can lawfully comply with “end to suffering” requests by eligible terminally ill patients in a process that always remains under direct control by the patient.



In addition to containing the expected strict requirements ensuring only eligible patients can access VAD, the draft VAD Bill has been written by Justice Peter Applegarth, chair of the QLRC, and his expert team, with the benefit of being able to assess interstate and international evidence in order to ensure fair and timely access to VAD for eligible patients.

An example is the sensible inclusion of legislative requirement for conscientiously



Justice Peter Applegarth ... expert team

objecting doctors and institutions to facilitate rather than obstruct referral for VAD services if so requested by patients under their care.

This stems from evidence in Victoria of certain religious-based institutions blocking patient access to VAD services even though it is a legally available option for eligible terminally ill patients.

Provided evidence-based voting outweighs politics and personal ideologies, Queensland politicians will, in the upcoming September parliamentary sittings, be able to proudly deliver this inherently compassionate and expertly safeguarded legislation in accordance with the wishes of an overwhelming majority of eight out of 10 people in the community.



Dr Sid Finnigan MBBS, FRANZCO
Queensland Convenor
[Doctors For Assisted Dying Choice](#)

UK doctors' changing views: See page 6

ALP reaffirms VAD stand

The Labor Party in Queensland has reaffirmed its official policy on voluntary assisted dying while recognising the availability of a conscience vote on a VAD Bill due to be debated by state MPs in September.

At the party's state conference in early June delegates passed a motion commending the move by Premier Anastacia Palaszczuk to progress VAD laws as well as investing more in palliative care.

Conference delegates urged MPs to support the VAD Bill when it is presented to parliament and noted that voluntary assisted dying was supported by the vast majority of Queenslanders.

The Electrical Trades Union, which has been a leading advocate of

Queensland VAD laws hosted a panel session at the conference.

Speakers included, Penny Tovey whose husband, former state secretary of the ETU Peter Simpson [campaigns strongly for VAD](#) prior to his death from melanoma in September 2020.

Ms Tovey [delivered a powerful speech](#) to delegates in support of VAD laws.

Others on the panel were VAD law expert Professor Ben White, chair of the Health Committee Aaron Harper MP, Andrew Denton of Go Gentle, Attorney-General Shannon Fentiman, and Premier Anastacia Palaszczuk.

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ABOVE: VAD panel Penny Tovey, Professor Ben White, Aaron Harper MP, Andrew Denton, Attorney-General Shannon Fentiman, Premier Anastacia Palaszczuk, and Stuart Traill BELOW: Peter Simpson

Aaron Harper MP who chaired the Health Committee VAD Inquiry, founder of Go Gentle Australia Andrew Denton, Attorney-General Shannon Fentiman, and Premier Anastacia Palaszczuk.

The panel session was chaired by ETU assistant state secretary

Stuart Traill.

Mr Traill told delegates at the panel session that it was time to pass VAD laws.

“It’s time to be courageous,” he said.



'Keeping mum' won't work for MPs any more

Voluntary assisted dying laws have already been passed by parliaments in three states – Victoria, Western Australia, and Tasmania.

The Queensland Parliament is expected to debate a VAD Bill in September and in South Australia a Bill is expected to pass in the next month.

Since way back in 1960 opinion polls have shown the Australian population's overwhelming support for VAD, now currently at over 80%.

So, it is instructive to ask why this law reform has taken more than half a century to happen?

Curiously it is because parliamentarians believed it to be politically toxic and have shied away from declaring their position on it.

When *The Courier-Mail* polled Queensland state MPs as to how they would vote on VAD legislation it decried that the vast majority wouldn't or couldn't voice a view.

It was also evident in Victoria and the other states in the lead-up to their vote on the legislation.

The Courier-Mail's editorial suggested that one explanation may be they are cowards operating under the hope that if they vote against the wishes of the people it goes unnoticed by their electorates.

What it did not say is that more often politicians have kept mum because they feared the churches. Just the threat of major church organisations campaigning against them from the pulpit, has been an intimidating prospect for many.

However, the futility of this "keeping mum" strategy is evident in state election outcomes.

In Victoria, for example where the Premier Daniel Andrews



Former Chief Minister of the Northern Territory MARSHALL PERRON who initiated the world's first voluntary assisted dying laws in 1995 says times have changed and politicians should recognise that backing VAD is no longer a liability but a political plus.

defied his own church to legislate VAD in 2017, most opposition Liberal Party MPs kept mum and then voted against the proposed VAD legislation. So how did that strategy fare?

The Liberal Party suffered a huge 6.04% swing against it.

Even more telling, the two sitting members who were the most virulent and vocal opponents of the VAD Bill lost their seats.

Andrews was returned in a resounding electoral victory picking up an eight-seat swing. So much for the "keeping mum" strategy.

Of course it wasn't all to do with VAD. Even though there are always a multitude of factors involved, it is hard to argue with the evidence that explicitly acknowledging and voting in line with the will of the people, has been influential.

Consider WA where Mark McGowan, even in his early days as opposition leader firmly declared his intention, if elected, to put VAD to the parliament for a conscience vote.

He won government in a solid victory. VAD law was duly passed in WA and McGowan's poll numbers soared skyward ever since.

With the super-charged momentum from COVID added,



Andrews



McGowan



Palaszczuk



Gutwein

McGowan went on to win a second term, decimate his Liberal opposition and reduce them to just two seats.

Then following McGowan in WA and Andrews in Victoria, Tasmanian Premier Peter Gutwein announced and voted to support a Private Member's Bill to legalise VAD in Tasmania.

In the snap election that he called almost simultaneously he then won a second term.

'Even though there are always a multitude of factors involved, it is hard to argue with the evidence that explicitly acknowledging and voting in line with the will of the people, has been influential'

And so to Queensland, where the Premier Annastacia Palaszczuk, in the most recent Queensland election, set voluntary assisted dying at the centre of her re-election campaign. She announced that Labor would legalise VAD if it won the election.

It triggered the usual threats to campaign against her by the Catholic and other churches and the religious lobby groups.

To no avail. She was listening to the voice of the people and after acknowledging the overwhelming majority support of VAD, she won a third term.

The cover story of a recent

Weekend Australian Magazine observed that: "A quarter of a century after Federal Parliament revoked the Northern Territory's world-first voluntary euthanasia law, the political tide is turning. 'It's an issue whose time has come,' says West Australian Premier Mark McGowan."

State elections have put voluntary assisted dying to the test.

It has been a test of the "keeping mum" tactic as well as a test of the waning power of the religious hierarchies.

They no longer enjoy the power to force the law not to change.

A big factor in denying the will of the people for half a century was the power of the Catholic Church opposition.

However, the moral authority of the churches has evaporated in the light of the mendacity and complicity revealed in the many children's sexual abuse inquiries.

Congregations are shrinking and the faithful who are left largely ignore the church's dictates on voluntary assisted dying as they have become accustomed to do with birth control and divorce.

The message should be clear in Queensland that threatened intimidation from religious political groups in order to override the will of the people, no longer works and nor does "keeping mum" to avoid the wrath of the electorate.

Supporting voluntary assisted dying is no longer a political liability, it is a political plus.

UK MP cites support by doctors for VAD law push



Baroness Meacher

Another attempt is being made in the UK to enact voluntary assisted dying laws.

Five years after the last attempt failed, a Private Member's Bill by a crossbench member of the House of Lords, Baroness Meacher, was formally introduced last month.

Baroness Meacher is chair of the UK VAD advocacy group [Dying in Dignity](#).

Her Bill was chosen for debate in a selection procedure used by the UK Parliament to handle the high volume of Private Member's Bills lodged each year. It is expected to be debated later this year.

Baroness Meacher noted high community support for VAD as well as strong support now evident among doctors. (See [below](#))

Baroness Meacher said her Bill was "modest in its scope and yet its potential to transform all our lives and deaths for the better is colossal".

"This option would enable terminally ill, mentally competent people whose suffering is beyond the reach of palliative care to die well and on their own terms,

should they choose it. And it would also provide invaluable comfort and control to countless more who may never avail themselves of this option but would be comforted by the simple fact of its existence."

BMA poll finds mood for policy change

Baroness Meacher's reference to support for VAD among doctors was based on a survey by the [British Medical Association](#) of its members showing 61% did not support the association's existing anti-VAD policy.

The [results of the survey](#) released in October 2020 showed 40% wanted the BMA to actively support VAD laws and 21% believed the BMA should adopt a neutral

position while 33% of those who responded favoured maintaining opposition to VAD laws.

The survey also revealed half of doctors polled personally supported VAD laws.

The results of the survey and the BMA's position on VAD will be discussed at [its annual representative meeting](#) being held in September.

In March 2019 following a

member survey the Royal College of Physicians dropped its longstanding opposition to assisted dying in favour of a [neutral stance](#).

The Royal College of GPs is facing a [legal challenge](#) by two of its members for [deciding to continue](#) its outright opposition to VAD despite a [survey of members](#) showing a shift from 77% to 47% over six years in members supporting its anti-VAD stand.

Tas MP recounts the VAD battle

The Rationalist Society of Australia recently hosted a [webinar](#) exploring the battle to have Tasmania's VAD laws passed. Independent upper house MP Mike Gaffney ([pictured](#)) whose Private Member's Bill was passed in March outlined the tactics he used and the arguments and opposition he faced and how he overcame them.



US doctor describes benefits of New Jersey law

A doctor in the US state of New Jersey says people seeking her involvement in requesting access to voluntary assisted dying – known there as medical aid in dying – are all very clear about their intentions.

[Quoted by the VAD advocacy group](#)

Compassion and Choices, Dr Deborah Pasik, a physician in Cedar Knolls NJ, said: "What I found remarkable about all of the terminally ill people I have prescribed medical aid in dying to, with no exceptions, was that they were all extremely clear in their requests; their decisions were made after weeks of discussions with their respective families, friends and even clergy.

"Every single one of them expressed gratitude and peace of mind, their

anxieties dissipated after being told that their prescriptions would be written.

"They then went on to celebrate their lives with their loved ones, record legacy videos, get their affairs in order with a clear-headedness that only comes with the knowledge that they were in control."

More than 90% of people using voluntary assisted dying in the US state of New Jersey chose to die at home.

A [report by the NJ Health Department](#) showed 33 residents used the state's *Medical Aid in Dying for the Terminally Ill Act* in 2020 – its first full year.

The figure compares to total pre-COVID deaths in the state in 2019 of more than 74,000.

The 33 deaths were split 21 male and 12 female. The largest single underlying condition was a form of cancer in 24 cases (73%) followed by a neurodegenerative condition in five cases (15%).

Of the 33 VAD deaths, 30 took place in the person's own home, two in another person's home and one in a nursing home.

The average age of the 33 patients was 72, with the ages of all patients ranging from 36 to 90. Seven cases involved people aged 85 or more.

New Jersey's VAD law took effect from August 2019. In the period from August to December 2019 a total of 12 deaths were reported under the law.

The state has a population of almost 9 million.



Doctors for Assisted Dying Choice



The *My Life My Choice* monthly newsletter is produced by the Clem Jones Group, Dying With Dignity Queensland, Doctors for Assisted Dying Choice (Qld), and Christians for Voluntary Assisted Dying (Qld) for the dominant purpose of educating and raising awareness of voluntary assisted dying law reform in Queensland and other states and territories.