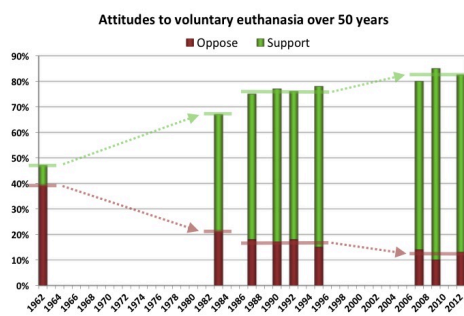


Newsletter on current debates: **the mysterious myths**

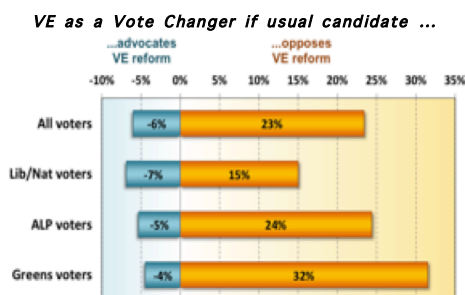
Discussion on voluntary euthanasia law reform is often clouded by misinformation and misleading claims that have become common 'myths'. It is clear that no matter how much suffering is involved, no matter how many safeguards are included, and regardless of the evidence, opponents who hold a personal conviction that voluntary euthanasia should never be allowed will not change their opinion. Some of their mysteriously sourced myths are dispelled below.

MPs who support voluntary euthanasia will suffer at the next election

Polling in Australia consistently shows overwhelming support for voluntary euthanasia – which means there would be no elector backlash for an MP who voted in favour of voluntary euthanasia.

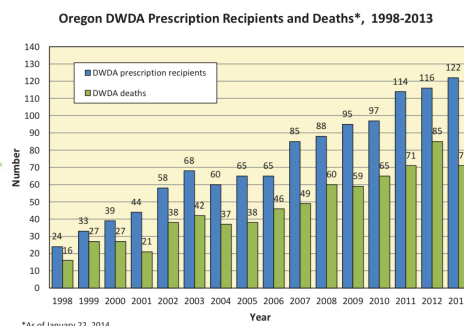


The most recent 2012 Newspoll of 2500 Australians established that 82% of respondents supported law reform, confirming the continuing trend. In addition, 23% of voters said they would change their vote if their usual candidate opposed reform, but only 6% of voters said they would change their vote if their usual candidate supported reform. (see graphs)



Ruthless relatives will kill their grannies and disabled people

The international evidence (summarised by Australia 21 Inc) demonstrates that safeguards work and that only people who meet specified criteria receive legal assistance to die. The criteria usually include the provision of information on treatment and care options, second opinions, witnessed requests and a cooling off period. For example after nearly two decades of operation of physician assisted dying in the USA state of Oregon, only 0.2% of all deaths in 2013 were attributed to voluntary euthanasia – a total of 71 people in a state with a population of nearly 4 million people. (see graph below)



Advocates for voluntary euthanasia law reform rely on fear or half-truths

Advocates for law reform base their arguments on research and hard data. For example, case studies of where palliative care is unable to adequately manage the suffering associated with the illness or the side effects of drugs are from documented, direct medical experience. The Australian Medical Association acknowledges that end-of-life suffering cannot always be relieved, and wide-ranging Australian research shows that an arguable majority of medical practitioners support a change to the existing law.

All we need is good palliative care

Palliative Care Australia and the Australian Medical Association both agree that even the best palliative care cannot relieve the suffering of a minority of patients.

Legalisation of euthanasia threatens the funding of palliative care

There is an unsubstantiated claim that legalising voluntary euthanasia undermines the provision of palliative care. The European Association of Palliative Care in 2011 stated that research into palliative and hospice care in countries with a euthanasia law has increased in the years following legislation; palliative care funding has been strengthened in the Netherlands and doubled in Belgium; a review in the USA found that states with physician-assisted dying laws rank very highly in the provision of palliative care. Research covering six European countries concluded that assisted dying legislation does not undermine the provision of palliative care.

Polling is ambiguous or misleading

Irrefutable evidence of overwhelming support for law reform based on scientific polling is often dismissed by a claim that the question is misleading. Each opinion poll uses professional bodies with statistically valid survey sampling methodologies. The question posed by surveys at regular intervals over the last four decades in Australia is clear:

“... Thinking now about voluntary euthanasia. If a hopelessly ill patient, experiencing unrelievable suffering, with absolutely no chance of recovering asks for a lethal dose, should a doctor be allowed to provide a lethal dose, or not?”

These are only a few of the common myths associated with voluntary euthanasia that need to be 'debunked'. However, even if every argument could be answered and every fear put to rest, some people will always be opposed to voluntary euthanasia due to personal and religious convictions. This is their right, but it is not a sound basis for public policy, nor a reason to deny the choice to the 82% of Australians who support law reform in favour of voluntary euthanasia.

(References provided on request)

South Australian Voluntary Euthanasia Society

saves.asn.au

SAVES was established in 1983 by volunteers to campaign for a South Australian law that provides for "medically assisted" end-to-life, as a right, in appropriate circumstances, and with defined safeguards. SAVES aims to raise public debate to a point where our Members of Parliament enact a VE law which provides everyone with the choice to end prolonged and painful suffering.



Doctors for Voluntary Euthanasia Choice

drs4vechoice.org

We are a national organisation of Australian medical practitioners, both current and retired, who are committed to having a legal choice of providing information and assistance to rational adults, who, for reasons of no realistic chance of cure or relief from intolerable symptoms, would like to gently end their lives. Assistance may be by doctor provision of medication for the patient to consume, or by doctor-administration.



Christians supporting choice for Voluntary Euthanasia

christiansforve.org.au

We are Christians who believe that, as a demonstration of love and compassion, those with a terminal or hopeless illness should have the option of a pain-free, peaceful and dignified death with legal voluntary euthanasia. The overwhelming majority of Australian Christians support choice for voluntary euthanasia.



SAVE-YA Syndicated Australian Voluntary Euthanasia Youth Advocates

Facebook: Support SAVE-YA Law Reform

A national youth lobby group which aims to provide a youth voice in support of legalising voluntary euthanasia in all Australian States/Territories. Members between the ages of 18 and 35 are encouraged to join and make contact with their local MP's to inform them of their support for voluntary euthanasia law reform.



Lawyers for Death with Dignity acknowledges the need for people with profound suffering to have the legal choice for a medically assisted and dignified death. The current law says suicide is not illegal, but assisting suicide is. In many cases, those who are in terminal states have profound, unbearable suffering and are put in the undignified position of being unable to end their life without assistance. The medical profession has advanced their discipline to improve life expectancy, but appropriate changes have not been reflected in the South Australian law to deal with an often forgotten deterioration of quality of life that this may bring. saves.asn.au/lawyers



South Australian Nurses Supporting Choices in Dying

Facebook: SA Nurses Supporting Choices in Dying

We are a group of passionate nurses who believe in our patient's right to choose the end of life care that they wish. The group provides a forum for the nursing voice and perspective on the legislation of voluntary euthanasia and other patient choices in end of life care in South Australia.