The road to legal voluntary euthanasia or physician assisted dying has been as varied as it is surprising in the nine jurisdictions around the world which support it. In predominantly Catholic Belgium, palliative care and voluntary euthanasia advocates have worked together, in The Netherlands, the courts led the way and the Royal Dutch Medical Association and government worked together to finalise the detail, in Oregon and Washington, citizen initiated referenda achieved the result, and in Switzerland, assisted dying is not illegal providing the assistance is not motivated by self-interest.

The USA states of Washington, Oregon, Montana and Vermont allow physician assisted dying (PAD), where the patient self administers a drug.

In Oregon a citizen referendum associated with the general election in 1994 voted 51.3% to 48.7% in favour of law reform. The legislation came into effect in 1997 following legal challenges and a further citizen vote in 1997, which increased support to 60%. Subsequent challenges concluded in 2006 with the US Supreme Court ruling 6-3 to uphold the law. The doctor is required to report the writing of any prescription for PAD and the Oregon Health Authority publishes data each year.

Over 3 million people in Washington State voted for Initiative 1000 at the general election in 2008, by a margin of 57.8% for and 42.2% against, with 30 of the 39 counties supporting the initiative.

In Montana, PAD is upheld by court rulings finding that it does not break any Montana law.

In 2013 the Vermont Parliament voted for a step-by-step process to facilitate PAD. This process sunsets in three years (2016), after which a new law takes effect which provides a legal protection for patients and doctors who use drugs to hasten death.

Quebec Province in Canada voted to legalise PAD in June 2014 with 80% of the legislature voting in support of Bill 52. The Bill was presented as a health measure in anticipation of an expected challenge as federal law prohibits voluntary euthanasia. The Bill would not come into effect until late 2015.

In 2001 The Netherlands was the first country in Europe to legalise voluntary euthanasia and PAD. Both had been widely tolerated since the 1970s, triggered by the 1973 “Postma case”, where a physician received a short, suspended sentence after helping her dying mother end her life, following repeated requests from her mother. The court acknowledged that while the physician did commit murder, a physician does not always have to keep a patient alive against his or her will when faced with pointless suffering. The debate progressed during the 1980s with policy development, reporting systems and further court cases. Of particular note was the active support of the Royal Dutch Medical Association which significantly influenced the development of “due care” criteria for guiding the process. Providing physicians complied with the “due care” criteria, they were not prosecuted. These criteria became the basis for the 2001 law.

The Belgium parliament voted to legalise voluntary euthanasia in 2002. A major difference in Belgium is the collaboration between palliative care and voluntary euthanasia advocates. Palliative care workers in Belgium accept that palliative care and euthanasia are integral aspects of good end-of-life care.

In Switzerland, PAD is not legal, but unpunishable, unless a selfish motive is proven. Article 115 of the Swiss Criminal Code reads: Any person who for selfish motives incites or assists another to commit or attempt to commit suicide is, if that other person thereafter commits or attempts to commit suicide, liable to a fine or gaol.

Luxembourg’s parliament voted to legalise voluntary euthanasia and physician assisted dying in 2009. The Bill triggered a constitutional crisis when the Head of State refused to sign off on the Bill and the parliament subsequently changed Grand Duke Henri’s role to be purely ceremonial.

1 In January 2014 a Judge in New Mexico ruled that it was a fundamental right to choose aid in dying; the ruling has not been tested and is currently under appeal; most jurisdictions which use specific legislation to legalise voluntary euthanasia or physician assisted dying use similar provisions – similar safeguards, cooling off periods, second opinions.
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.

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.