

End of Life Choice



Newsletter on current debates

High level support for VE law reform

Australia21 is a non-profit research company which addresses some of the complex and difficult issues facing Australia. It connects the nation's best thinkers, researchers, business leaders and policy influencers in collaborative networks. Australia21 uses interdisciplinary approaches, sound research and fresh thinking to discover new frameworks for understanding complex issues likely to have significant impacts on the future of all Australians.

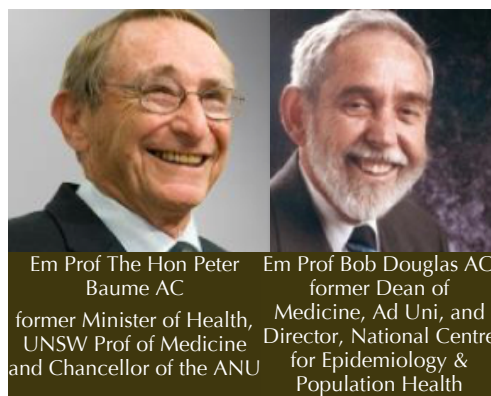
In January 2013 Australia21 convened a high level Roundtable of eminent authorities from multiple disciplines to examine voluntary euthanasia (VE) and physician assisted dying (PAD) in Australia. Participants included former politicians, doctors, lawyers, palliative care workers, students and opponents and supporters of assisted dying.



Following the Roundtable, Australia21 recommended that **State governments should develop legislation to permit and regulate voluntary euthanasia and physician assisted dying in defined and limited circumstances.**

The "circumstances" refer to criteria such as: the person being defined as competent; the action being voluntary and informed; the person reaching a stage where life has become intolerable or has a terminal illness; there be a clear decision making process with forms, specified roles for doctors and time lags between the decision and the action; and there be an agreed monitoring mechanism.

In launching the final report, Emeritus Professor The Hon Peter Baume AC, said "Voluntary euthanasia goes on every day – but without supervision, without advice from colleagues and without rules... Access to most goods and services is unequal in society and this is likely to be the case with voluntary euthanasia..."



In releasing the final report Emeritus Professor Bob Douglas AO commented "World views on assisted dying are changing rapidly. In recent years a number of jurisdictions around the world have decriminalised physician assisted dying and voluntary euthanasia with generally satisfactory outcomes. National polls make it clear that Australians want to have this possibility available to them as they approach the end of their life. Australia21 believes that the current law on voluntary euthanasia and physician assisted dying is flawed. Reform is needed."

The Australia21 report continued: this debate occurs in the context of ongoing advances in medicine. Lives can be sustained in circumstances that have never previously been contemplated, and decisions need to be made about whether to give life-sustaining medical treatment, or allow the individual to die.

The Roundtable identified the following reasons why the law needs to change:

1 The Australian community overwhelmingly supports change: over the past 25 years professional pollsters have consistently reported overwhelming support in favour of reform.

2 Prohibition has failed: despite being illegal, VE and PAD are occurring in Australia. Doctors who admit they have acted illegally to end a person's life are not being prosecuted. Current law allows

voluntary withdrawal of life sustaining treatment, but the consensual provision of lethal medication is illegal; terminal sedation may or may not be legal; suicide is legal, but assisting someone to commit suicide is illegal. Current law fails the principle of "equality before the law" in two key areas: some people may be able to use their education and networks to acquire the means to end their life, while others do not have such networks; some people who are dependent on life-supporting equipment, such as a respirator, can request it be removed, while others do not have that option.

3 Some terminally ill patients choose an early and sometimes violent death: distressed people may end their lives by suicide. This can be violent, painful and lonely for the person, and traumatic for family and friends or the person who finds them.

4 Palliative care cannot address all suffering: despite advances in modern medicine, palliative care is unable to relieve the pain and suffering of some patients.



Opposition to law reform

The Roundtable identified two major arguments against law reform: concerns that the vulnerable will be placed at risk and the theological view that the divinely conferred sanctity of human life prevents the intentional taking of life.

The Roundtable concluded that evidence from countries and states where VE or PAD is possible shows no risk to vulnerable people.

In relation to religious opposition, the Roundtable concluded that given Australia is a democratic and secular society, religious teachings should not be regarded as a basis for developing law and policy: respect for religious beliefs should not bind others who have different beliefs and values.

SAVES

South Australian Voluntary Euthanasia Society

saves.asn.au

Compassion for suffering
The freedom to choose
Add your voice to the call



SAVES was established in 1983 to campaign for legal, medically assisted choice in end-of-life arrangements.

The aim is to relieve suffering by providing choice for people at the end of their life. SAVES works in the community and with Members of Parliament to achieve law reform.

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 States and Territories. Members

between ages 18 and 35 are encouraged to join, make contact with their local MP and inform them of their support for voluntary euthanasia law reform.

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.



Lawyers for Death with Dignity

saves.asn.au/lawyers

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. People in a terminal state may have profound, unbearable suffering and be in the undignified position of being unable to end their life without assistance. Advances in medicine have improved life expectancy, but South Australian law has not changed to reflect the often forgotten deterioration of quality of life that a longer life expectancy may bring.



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.

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 legalisation of voluntary euthanasia and other patient choices in end of life care in South Australia.



BREAKING NEWS BREAKING NEWS BREAKING NEWS

Australia's legal system recognises very few human rights. We are the only democratic nation in the world without a Bill of Rights, and so many of our most basic wants and needs receive no legal protection. The state of the law on voluntary euthanasia reflects this.

As it stands, Australian law allows a doctor to provide palliative care to ease a person's pain and suffering. It has long been assumed that this is permissible even where it has the double effect of hastening the person's death.

On the other hand, the law forbids a doctor from acting on a request from an incurably ill patient to end their life. The result is a grey area for people experiencing great pain and suffering due to an incurable, but not life-threatening, illness. They are not permitted by law to gain the assistance of a doctor to end their life.

The best that the law offers such a person is to permit them to starve to death. This was recognised in 2009 by the Chief Justice of Western Australia, Wayne Martin. He held that Christian Rossiter, who had become a quadriplegic due to a road accident and was "unable to undertake any basic human functions", was entitled to instruct his carers to remove a feeding tube from his stomach.

In thus, Australian judges have taken matters as far as they can. A right to starve to death is as far as the law is likely to develop in our courts. Any further steps must be left to our elected representatives in Parliament. (Prof George Williams, UNSW, ABC The Drum, 25.3.2015)