

End of Life Choice



Safety and security in Australia's Voluntary Assisted Dying model

Former Supreme Court Judge and inaugural Chair of the Voluntary Assisted Dying Review Board in Victoria, Betty King, has provided an insight into the safety and security systems built into Victoria's voluntary assisted dying program, which has become the basis for the Australian model. With a background in criminal law, Betty King is a former member of the National Crime Authority and as a judge ran the gangland trials in Victoria. She is well versed in understanding safeguards and security and identifying potential flaws in any system.

- "The process required to comply with the legislation is extremely detailed and it is this detail and the comprehensive information requirements that provide so many of the key safeguards for the public in relation to abuse of this process," she told a webinar hosted by Palliative Care South Australia last Tuesday 1 June.
- Eight forms must be completed, submitted, checked, approved and then reviewed by the VAD Review Board; a separate VAD Permit is issued after all the paperwork is checked by the Secretary of the Department of Health
- All forms are submitted online through the VAD portal with the process designed to ensure there can be no tampering with any forms
- Compliance and ensuring the request is voluntary are the areas of most concern to the public, and the 13-member VAD Review Board monitors and reviews compliance and 'voluntariness' with great care
- There are multiple safeguards to ensure the request for VAD is voluntary and without coercion, including: the doctor being prohibited from mentioning VAD as part of an end of life treatment plan; the two assessing doctors being VAD trained and a Fellow of a College; the extensive and detailed requirements for the medical assessment; confirmation by two independent witnesses; the request to, and assessment by, two pharmacists; the requirement for the medical practitioners and pharmacists to, at every stage of the process, inform the applicant that they can withdraw their request; the required time difference from the first to final request; that the applicant is required to voluntarily, independently and formally request VAD at least six times
- The multidisciplinary VAD Review Board reviews each case after every death and no abuse of the system has been identified in the first two years
- Applicants report that the process of requesting and being assessed for VAD is painstaking and difficult
- Faith-based institutions which do not support VAD have a policy to 'not impede' a patient's request
- The substance is delivered to the person by two pharmacists, who spend upwards of two hours with the person explaining the process, checking their understanding, their decision-making capacity, and that the request is voluntary
- 32% of applicants assessed as eligible in Victoria do not use the VAD substance, but in Betty King's words, "it means it is achieving its purpose, giving people a choice ... with people feeling they get some control back by having the substance"
- Decision-making capacity is assessed during each consultation by medical practitioners, in a similar way to the requirement for medical practitioners to constantly assess decision-making capacity in all discussions about treatment options and end of life treatment; the two pharmacists also assess decision-making capacity and if they assess that the patient is not competent, the substance will not be dispensed
- 90% of people who request VAD in Victoria are in palliative care.

Betty King's hour-long presentation can be viewed on the Palliative Care South Australia website at

<https://pallcare.asn.au/webinars/>



**Voluntary
Assisted
Dying
South
Australia**

VADSA was established in 1983 to campaign for legal voluntary assisted dying. The aim is to provide people who are suffering at the end of their life with the choice of a medically assisted death. VADSA works in the community and with Members of Parliament to achieve law reform.

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 choice in their end of life care treatment. The group provides a forum for the nursing voice and perspective on legalising voluntary assisted dying and other patient choices in end of life care.

Voluntary Assisted Dying Youth Advocates

vadsa.org.au/about/VADpartners

A national youth lobby group which aims to provide a youth voice in support of legalising voluntary assisted dying 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 legal voluntary assisted dying.

Christians Supporting Choice For Voluntary Assisted Dying

christiansforvad.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 assisted dying. This is strongly supported by the majority of Australian Christians.

Accessible Voluntary Assisted Dying (AVAD)

facebook: Accessible Voluntary Assisted Dying

Accessible Voluntary Assisted Dying is a community of people supporting more equitable access to palliative care services and the choice of a medically assisted death when palliative care cannot relieve suffering at the end of life. Through our facebook page, AVAD encourages people isolated by a disability, or social and physical isolation, to exchange views and lobby for equitable access to legal Voluntary Assisted Dying.

Doctors for Assisted Dying Choice

drs4assisteddyingchoice.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.

Respecting rational patient end-of-life choices

Lawyers for Voluntary Assisted Dying

vadsa.org.au/about/VADpartners

Lawyers for Voluntary Assisted Dying acknowledge the need for people with profound suffering at the end of life to have the legal choice of a medically assisted death. People diagnosed with a terminal illness may have profound and unbearable suffering which is unable to be relieved by even the best of palliative care. We support the provision of a legal choice for people with profound suffering to seek medical assistance to end that suffering.

Paramedics Supporting Choices in Dying

facebook: Paramedics Supporting Choices in Dying

Paramedics Supporting Choices in Dying is an advocacy group promoting the rights of people to make decisions regarding their end of life wishes.

To go without pain, without trauma, without breaking the law, without endangering others and without suffering. To go gently, peacefully and with dignity.

We support good palliative care, encourage the use of Advance Care Directives and advocate for law reform to legalise the choice for voluntary assisted dying.