

To the chairs of the Joint Select Committee on the End of Life Choices,

As concerned residents of Western Australia, we take this time to write to you regarding the possibility of assisted suicide and/or euthanasia becoming legalized in our state. We believe it is unnecessary, unsafe and unwise.

Palliative care providers across Australia are united in their opposition to euthanasia and assisted suicide as a means of 'treatment' for chronic or terminal illness. With good palliative care, pain and other symptoms can be effectively managed, so that "if you provide the right palliative care urgently, effectively and confidently, you don't have to have the sorts of deaths that proponents of this legislation are suggesting you can't avoid" (Former AMA Victoria presidents urge MPs to reject euthanasia legislation, abc.net.au, 19/09/2017).

By suggesting euthanasia as a 'treatment', we are effectively telling those who are suffering that their lives are no longer worth living. Already those who are sick or elderly are at their most vulnerable and this is when we need to step up and protect them. We should be emphasizing their value to us, not presenting the legal option of physician assisted death, embedding the idea that they are 'better off dead'. An alternative option could be that we work to improve the care they receive in the homes, increasing nurse/carer to patient ratio, and working to provide a higher quality palliative care.

Furthermore, as stated in the Good Medical Practice: a Code of Conduct for Doctors in Australia, "*Doctors have a responsibility to protect and promote the health of individuals and the community... Good medical practice involves using your expertise and influence to protect and advance the health and wellbeing of individual patients, communities and populations.*" It seems clear to us that suggesting to legalize euthanasia /assisted suicide is not protecting and promoting the health of individuals/communities, rather it is doing the exact opposite by undermining their health and promoting 'end of life' instead. Besides, where would the line be drawn? There are many who think they would be better off dead, or that the world would be better off without them. We think of those with mental health issues for example. If we put protection measures in place for them, why would we not do the same for those who are elderly or sick and having the same thoughts? Being aged or unwell does not lessen a person's value.

Legalizing assisted suicide and euthanasia sends a confusing message about suicide prevention. As a society, we are actively committing ourselves to reducing the tragedy of suicide – except, it seems, for those who are old and unwell. This is an inexcusable double standard. Furthermore, data from the US shows that the legalization of assisted suicide is actually linked to an increase in the overall suicide rate, and a massive 14.5% rise of suicides among over 65s (D Jones and D Paton (2015), How does legalization of physician assisted suicide

affect rates of suicide? Southern Medical Journal, 180 (10), pp. 599-604).

We have also read many stories of those who have survived an attempted suicide. Many of them, whether or not the decision was rushed or planned, have feelings of regret the moment they made the attempt. We read of one such man who attempted suicide by jumping off a bridge after stating clearly: nobody cares anyway. The moment he jumped he thought, "What am I doing? I don't want to die!" Another such man had similar thoughts as he wrote, "I instantly realized that everything in my life that I'd thought was unfixable, was totally fixable – except for having jumped." You see, despite the fact that they thought death was the best option, that nobody cared, that their problems couldn't be fixed, they realized the moment they jumped that none of it was true.

And while these suicides are somewhat different to the issue you are reviewing, one thing remains the same. Both see death as the only option. Both are making that 'jump', whether it is on their own or with approval/assistance from a physician. Death is final. It is not a treatment that can be started and then aborted if they decide they don't want it after all. Once it is done, it is done, there's no going back. So why would we want to promote or legalize a choice that is going to cost someone their life?

As we close this letter we would like to share something that we read with you. *Death is a natural occurrence. Sometimes God allows a person to suffer for a long time before death occurs; other times, a person's suffering is cut short. No one enjoys suffering, but that does not make it right to determine that a person should die.* It is not up to us to decide when a person should die. We cannot and should not play God.

Instead we need greater awareness of and resources for palliative care services, so that all people can access the medical, pastoral and spiritual care they need at the end of their life. This is the only truly humane and dignified response.

We thank you for your consideration!

Kind regards,

The undersigned.

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