



PERTH CATHOLIC
YOUTH MINISTRY

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The Principal Research Officer
Joint Select Committee on End of Life Choices
Legislative Assembly at Parliament House
11 Harvest Terrace
West Perth WA 6005

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SUBMISSION to the Joint Select Committee on End of Life Choices

Catholic Youth Ministry (CYM) is the official agency supporting and promoting youth ministry in the Archdiocese of Perth. Our aim is to assist teens and young adults in their personal and spiritual growth and to help them find their place in the Church and the world. This includes an awareness of what is happening in society and, where necessary, to put their faith into action.

It has come to the attention of CYM that the Parliament of Western Australia has called for submissions regarding the end of life choices. It has been observed that whenever this issue is raised, the matter of euthanasia or assisted dying follows. The position of CYM is that these measures should not be legal under any circumstances. Human life, at whatever stage or condition, is precious and of infinite worth from conception to natural death.

There are many defensible reasons why euthanasia or assisted dying are not to be permitted. However, for this submission, CYM draws the Committee's consideration to **the experience of "chronic" illness under its Term of Reference One**. This has caught the attention of CYM because young people too can suffer from chronic illnesses, and therefore this concerns our work. Focussing on two scenarios which may present in a young person's life:

1. Disability

There are many illnesses that result in disability. CYM is concerned that if euthanasia is permitted for chronic illness (already a wide spectrum that could even be interpreted to capture congenital conditions), then over time legislation would extend to disability itself. Addressing Victorian MPs who are currently considering legislating for euthanasia, CYM submits a quote from Craig Wallace who voices concern from people with disabilities:

... people with disability are entitled to ask members of parliament: why are you hurrying to grant us the "choice" to die when you never lifted a finger to fix the barriers that made our lives miserable or gave us equal access to preventative health? Until every person with disability has



equal access to screening, prevention and treatment in our health system, suicide prevention resources, and meaningful alternatives to ending it all, offering us euthanasia isn't an act of generous equality.

Wallace, C., "Euthanasia a choice for people with disability? It's a threat to our lives." *The Guardian*.
<https://www.theguardian.com/commentisfree/2017/sep/27/euthanasia-a-choice-for-people-with-disability-its-a-threat-to-our-lives>

2. Mental health

CYM is concerned about the mental wellbeing in young people, and notes that many mental illnesses, such as depression, are "chronic". One manifestation of mental imbalance is youth suicide. In agreement with secular society, CYM is supports initiatives to curtail youth suicide. The abstract below demonstrates how incremental extension is set in motion when euthanasia is permitted to include chronic conditions such as mental illness:

Laws permitting physician-assisted death in the United States currently are limited to terminal conditions. Canada is considering whether to extend the practice to encompass intractable suffering caused by mental disorders, and the question inevitably will arise in the United States. Among the problems seen in countries that have legalized assisted death for mental disorders are difficulties in assessing the disorder's intractability and the patient's decisional competence, and the disproportionate involvement of patients with social isolation and personality disorders. *Legitimate concern exists that assisted death could serve as a substitute for creating adequate systems of mental health treatment and social support.* [Emphasis added]

Appelbaum, P.S., "Should Mental Disorders be a basis for Physician-Assisted Death?" *Psychiatric Services* 2017; 68:315–317; doi: 10.1176/appi.ps.201700013

CYM offers the following recommendations for the Committee's Report:

- Improved equal access to preventative health for people with disabilities
- Increased funding for youth mental health wellbeing
- A statement that euthanasia and assisted dying are contrary to measures against suicide.

Yours faithfully

Anita Parker

Director of Catholic Youth Ministry Perth