



The Australian Family Association

Western Australian Division

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Submission to the Joint Select Committee on End of Life Choices

Inquiry into the need for laws in Western Australia to allow citizens to make informed decisions regarding their own end of life choices.

We are opposed to any changes in the law which will make it easier for a person to request that a medical practitioner assist them in ending their lives.

- The choice to end one's life has to involve another person. The decision is ultimately that of a doctor not the patient so it is a fallacy to say that it is the persons "choice" even though the person may have made a request to that effect.
It is unconscionable that a medical practitioner who has spent many years learning the art of making people well, should ever have to contemplate an act which will ultimately end someone's life. Legalising assisted suicide would place an unbearable burden on medical practitioners who would be called upon to make the decision as to whether a person is medically competent to request to end their life or not.
- The experience of countries where voluntary euthanasia has been legalised shows that it is virtually impossible to enforce safeguards. It is a fallacy to claim that safeguards will ensure that the legislation is restricted to those at the end stages of a terminal illness. This should ring alarm bells for all disabled Australians.
Legalising voluntary euthanasia paves the way for euthanasia without consent. Up to a third of Belgian euthanasia cases occur without consent.
- It has been shown that when seriously ill patients receive good palliative care, both physical and psychological, they rarely want to end their lives

People in general but especially older people, may not be up to date on the latest methods of pain management and how effective they can be. They understandably fear suffering and may see assisted suicide as the only response to what they perceive as unrelievable pain. There needs to be universal access for all Australians to the highest standard and most up to date methods of palliative care including using sedation as a last resort.

- There is the danger of people feeling pressured or coerced for a variety of reasons, into signing end of life requests.

- Australia's ageing population has seen an increase in elder abuse. Allowing voluntary euthanasia and assisted suicide opens the door for disabled, sick and elderly people to see themselves as a financial and emotional burden. The 'right to die' could become a 'duty to die'. No safeguards can protect against this. In Oregon, 40% of those receiving legal assisted suicide in 2014 cited "being a burden" as a reason.

Conclusion: Making it easier to request the right to assisted suicide would pose a real threat to vulnerable members of our society – the disabled, those with mental health issues, those with suicidal tendencies, as well as the elderly. Legalising assisted suicide cannot be made safe for such Australians as has been shown to be the case in other countries where it has been made legal.

Changing the law to facilitate assisted suicide would amount to state-sanctioned suicide and would send a message that some people's lives are not worth living at a time when the number of youth suicides is increasing at an unprecedented rate

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