

Dear Members of the Joint Select Committee on End of Life Choices.

As a resident of Western Australia, I am writing to express my concern about the possibility of assisted suicide and/or euthanasia becoming legalised in our state. The reality is that physician assisted death is both unnecessary, and unsafe.

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)

Euthanasia and assisted suicide is a dangerous option for vulnerable people. Many elderly, disabled and chronically ill people already feel they are a 'burden' on their family and marginalised by society. Rather than affirming the value of every person to our society, even presenting the legal option of physician assisted death for frail and dependent people further embeds the idea that they are 'better off dead' and their lives not worth living

Legalising 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 legalisation 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).

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.

I further respectfully refer your committee to an opinion article on page 16 in The West Australian today (Monday, 23rd October, 2017) by Andrew Bolt called: "Euthanasia's Slippery Slope." In it, he refers to several occurrences in the Netherlands which are horrifying accounts of how liberalising euthanasia laws can have currently unforeseen consequences. Sadly, he is not exaggerating! Having maintained close contacts with the land of my birth, I have read many similar accounts of how life has become fearfully uncertain for many, to the extent that there are not a few elderly citizens of this supposedly progressively modern, egalitarian society who fear for their very lives. This fearful situation commenced with similar considerations as are being proposed in Australia today.

But most importantly of all, my concerns are based on the words of Almighty God, the Creator of the universe, Who laid down the good laws that all of life is sacred and cannot be arbitrarily taken with impunity. Despite all their shortcomings and failings, our forefathers in Australia built this nation on Christian principles, it was these principles that made our nation great and a safe haven for many. Rejection of these principles will gradually destroy our nation and relegate society back to the law of the jungle. Please do not tinker in any way with these laws that will gradually erode the precious sanctity of human life.

Respectfully yours,

Mr Gerrit and Mrs Allegonda van der Wal,