



# National Civic Council



Principal Research Officer  
Joint Select Committee on End of Life Choices  
Legislative Assembly  
Parliament House  
PERTH WA 6000

27<sup>th</sup> September, 2017

Dear Sir/Madam,

I wish to submit a paper we have prepared addressing most of the issues emanating from the Terms of Reference of your inquiry.

Yours sincerely

John R Barich  
State President

## **Euthanasia — not truly dignified, not compassionate, not safe**

Compassion for the sick and suffering is something which unites us all. Many of us have journeyed with friends or family as they face the fear and uncertainty of a serious or terminal illness. Our heart goes out to them and we wish only the best for them.

From time to time euthanasia or assisted suicide are proposed as the compassionate choice for people who are facing such illness. Euthanasia may be defined as deliberately bringing about death by active intervention or by neglect of reasonable care in order to end suffering. Assisted suicide is when a person is prescribed lethal drugs with which to kill themselves, with the purpose of eliminating suffering.

We hear people saying that this would allow people to 'die with dignity' and that it is each individual's 'right' to choose the timing and means of their death via these means.

This view, although born of compassion, is misguided and even dangerous. Killing one another is wrong, and this principle is fundamental to our rule of law. In the very few jurisdictions overseas where euthanasia or assisted suicide have been introduced, there is already ample evidence that the system is being abused and the requirement for checks and balances are being ignored.

All Australians seek a compassionate response to illness and suffering. We ask you to consider the following myths and facts outlining why euthanasia, or government authorised killing, is never a compassionate response and can never be introduced safely.

Myth 1: Euthanasia can be legislated for safely

Fact: Euthanasia and assisted suicide can never be introduced safely. No law can protect vulnerable people from succumbing to euthanasia, if it is available, as a result of their own feelings of fear, depression, loneliness, or even coercion from family members. Experience in other countries has shown clearly that it is impossible to legislate safely for government-authorised killing, no matter how many checks and balances are put in place. This is one of many strong reasons that the prohibition of killing principle is so deeply embedded in our law and ethics throughout the world, recognised in international human rights documents, and basic to our common morality.

## Myth 2: Dying with Dignity

Fact: Our dignity is not dependent on our usefulness, but simply on our humanity. As a society we should be judged by how well we care for the sick and vulnerable. Everyone has the right to be loved, supported and cared for until they die. Suicide is always a tragedy. There is nothing truly dignified about being killed or having someone assist your-suicide-, even when the motive is compassion for suffering. The community is rightly concerned about the high level of suicide in Australia. Introducing euthanasia is introducing another form of suicide, which has the double consequence'of also directly involving others in that suicide.

## Myth 3: Euthanasia is an issue of personal liberty and personal choice.

Fact: Euthanasia always involves a second person and is therefore a public act with public consequences. One person assisting the death of another is a matter of significant public concern because it can lead to abuse, exploitation and erosion of care for vulnerable people. Euthanasia would forever change the paradigm of doctor-patient relationships, from one of a duty to care and heal and comfort, to one where a doctor is given the power to kill or to help you kill yourself.

## Myth 4: It's worked well in other countries, such as The Netherlands, Belgium and Oregon in the US.

Fact: The Dutch model is not working well. The so-called strict guidelines are failing badly, with deadly consequences. Medically assisted death in The Netherlands was originally intended to be tightly regulated and strictly limited to adults who were able to make a free and informed request to die and who were undergoing unbearable suffering. The practice has now expanded to include many vulnerable people, including the unconscious, disabled babies, children, people with dementia and psychiatric illnesses, many of whom cannot provide informed consent. The Dutch government's own statistics show that more than 300 people die each year from euthanasia without explicit coonsent. In Belgium, the government has extend it euthanasia legislation to include terminally ill children who ask for it. In Oregon the legislation allows lethal drugs to be administered without oversight, leaving enormous scope for family pressure or elder abuse to be applied.

## Myth 5

Euthanasia should be legalized because opinion polls support it



Fact: Parliaments don't legislate on opinion polls alone. Parliaments are elected to consider all the relevant arguments and to legislate in favour of the common good, to protect the vulnerable, whose voices and concerns are often not heard in opinion polls. The devil is very much in the detail when it comes to euthanasia, and when parliaments across the world have had a chance to examine all the evidence and all the dangers, the great majority of them have voted against it, even in the face of strong opinion poll support.

There is another way

Palliative Care works. Palliative Care Australia says that good, well-resourced palliative care gives people the ability not only to live well in their illness, but to die well too, "free from pain, in the place of their choice, with people they wish to be present, and above all, with dignity". If people's individual experience of their loved ones' dying does not reflect this, then we need as a society to place greater priority on palliative care and to direct resources to it. Great medical gains are being made in palliative care and many families speak of palliative care as providing very precious time with their loved one.

What can you do?

You can help ensure that Australians are always treated with true dignity and compassion, right up to the point of their death, by becoming an Ambassador for Love in your own family, workplace and local community. Talk to your friends, family, colleagues and Members of Parliament about the dangers of euthanasia for our society. Get involved in the debate because this is a debate which affects us all.