



September 2026

Dear Colleague

Voluntary assisted dying: the Australian experience

In 2024 we wrote to express our support for the Terminally Ill Adults (End of Life) Bill and share our experiences as leaders of similar laws in Australia. We understand that your parliament is yet to reach a conclusion in the debate, and we thought it would be useful to write about the evidence that has since emerged showing that the laws are operating safely and as intended.

Compassionate and safe end-of-life voluntary assisted dying laws now exist in all eight jurisdictions, including the Australian Capital Territory, where implementation of the assisted dying law commenced in 2025 and the Northern Territory where the law passed in August 2026. While the laws differ slightly across jurisdictions, they share requirements that access must be limited to adults who are at the end stage of a terminal illness, maintain decision-making capacity throughout the process, are not under pressure from others, and whose suffering cannot be tolerably relieved. Eligibility requirements are assessed in all jurisdictions by two independent healthcare practitioners who have undertaken required training. Establishing these requirements was the way to legislate safe laws that protect the vulnerable.

All Australian laws require mandatory reporting. Annual reports from independent oversight bodies in all jurisdictions as well as statutory reviews in Victoria and Western Australia have consistently found strong compliance. Any criticism has focused on barriers to access, particularly in rural and regional parts of the country where it is difficult to find a doctor who has done the training. There is no evidence of misuse with access limited to those that parliaments intended to be eligible. Voluntary assisted dying only accounts for about two per cent of deaths nationally.

Australia has one of the best palliative care systems in the world but we consistently found that no matter how good palliative care is, there will be people who will still experience substantial suffering at the end of their life. There was strong consensus in all Australian parliaments that voluntary assisted dying must never replace palliative care and reforms encouraged increased government investment in palliative care. The two are not mutually exclusive and dying people need both.

The evidence we now have confirms that voluntary assisted dying and palliative care work well together with four in five (82 per cent) of applicants having also accessed palliative care.

As proponents of the bills that delivered the reforms, we regularly hear from people whose loved ones have accessed voluntary assisted dying. Reports are overwhelmingly affirming, often including descriptions of peaceful deaths and opportunities to say goodbye.

The laws remain popular and the transparent reporting requirements give Australians confidence in the process. We note that more doctors are undertaking the training. The laws are widely considered as a compassionate safeguard against extreme suffering at the end of life in the face of a terminal illness.

The Australian model shows that accessible voluntary assisted dying laws can operate safely and can offer an unprecedented level of transparency that helps to build trust in our healthcare systems. As you consider how to vote, if you wish to learn more about the legislative process or how Australian laws are functioning, we would be happy to talk to you.

We encourage you to review the reports available as you consider the bill before you.

- NSW Voluntary Assisted Dying Board annual reports:
<https://www.health.nsw.gov.au/voluntary-assisted-dying/Pages/board.aspx>
- Victorian Voluntary Assisted Dying Review Board annual reports:
<https://www.health.vic.gov.au/voluntary-assisted-dying/voluntary-assisted-dying-review-board>
- Independent Review of the Operation of Victoria's Voluntary Assisted Dying Act 2017: <https://www.parliament.vic.gov.au/4a247e/globalassets/taled-paper-documents/taled-paper-9026/vad-five-year-review---final-report.pdf>
- Queensland Voluntary Assisted Dying Review Board reports:
<https://www.health.qld.gov.au/clinical-practice/guidelines-procedures/voluntary-assisted-dying/review-board/publications>
- Western Australian Voluntary Assisted Dying Board annual reports:
https://www.health.wa.gov.au/Articles/U_Z/Voluntary-Assisted-Dying-Board
- Western Australian Department of Health Review of the Voluntary Assisted Dying Act 2019: <https://www.health.wa.gov.au/News/2024/Review-of-the-Voluntary-Assisted-Dying-Act-2019>
- Tasmanian Voluntary Assisted Dying Commission annual reports:
<https://www.health.tas.gov.au/health-topics/voluntary-assisted-dying-1>
- South Australia Voluntary Assisted Dying Board annual reports
<https://www.sahealth.sa.gov.au/wps/wcm/connect/public+content/sa+health+internet/about+us/publications+and+resources/reports/annual+reports/voluntary+assisted+dying+board>

Wishing you all the best

The Honourable Michael Gaffney
Member of the Legislative Council
Parliament of Tasmania

Mr Alex Greenwich MP
Member for Sydney
Parliament of New South Wales

Prof. The Hon. Jill Hennessy
Former Minister for Health
Former Attorney-General
Parliament of Victoria

Hon Sonya Kilkenney MP
Attorney-General
Minister for Planning
Parliament of Victoria

Hon Kyam Maher MLC
Deputy Premier
Minister for Aboriginal Affairs
Attorney-General
Minister for Industrial Relations
Minister for Arts
Special Minister of State
South Australia

Ms Tara Cheyne MLA
Attorney-General
Minister for City and Government
Services
Minister for Transport
Manager of Government Business
Australian Capital Territory

The Honourable Amber-Jade Sanderson MLA
Minister for Energy and Decarbonisation;
Manufacturing; Skills and TAFE; Pilbara;
Minister Assisting the Minister for Defence
Industries
Western Australia

The Hon Steven Miles MP
Leader of the Opposition
Queensland Parliament

Selena Uibo MLA
Member for Arnhem
Leader of the Opposition
Northern Territory Parliament