

SUBMISSION

Into

Provisions of the Voluntary Assisted Dying Bill 2021

Supplementary questions:

**Mr Gregory Bondar,
NSW & ACT State Director,
Family Voice Australia (NSW)**

From

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**LAW AND JUSTICE COMMITTEE
INQUIRY INTO THE PROVISIONS OF THE VOLUNTARY
ASSISTED DYING BILL 2021**

Supplementary questions:

**Mr Gregory Bondar, NSW & ACT State Director, Family Voice
Australia (NSW)**

**Q.1 Can you elucidate on the comments made in your
opening statement at the inquiry hearing regarding the
implications of the New South Wales Parliament passing the
Voluntary Assisted Dying Bill 2021 and its impact on the
Indigenous citizens of the state?**

Having held the position of CEO for **Tharawal Local Aboriginal
Land Council** (TLALC) I was periodically involved in discussing the
issue of Euthanasia/VAD.

Most recently, I was in discussions with various indigenous
colleagues who have confirmed that the Aboriginal culture does not
accept VAD.

In particular, I have feedback from Seraphina Presley-Haines, a
Lutheran Christian, aged about fifty-six and an experienced
schoolteacher, and community leader in Alice Springs.

She was asked what her opinion of euthanasia was, trying to be as
neutral as possible. She unequivocally said she and **most of her
people would be strongly opposed to euthanasia, believing
that we should let God take the person in the natural way.**
They thought it was cruel to take someone's life by giving them a
needle.

She was happy to be quoted as saying so.

If NSW Parliament, especially the Greens, have a commitment to
Black Lives Matter then the VAD bill currently before the House
should be rejected on that basis alone.

Was there any indigenous consultation?

FamilyVoice has serious concerns about this bill as it has numerous
unintended consequences. Aboriginal people will yet again be at the
mercy of the professionals who are authorised to prescribe and
administer the lethal drugs if you indicate a willingness to end your
life.

In an article in October 2020, Aboriginal Deacon Ralph Madigan who makes pastoral visits to remote communities in far north Queensland said:

"Euthanasia is wrong. In my family circle we would not think of it. We believe in dying naturally. We have had family that have died from sicknesses, and much in pain, but we would not dream of having euthanasia. Life is important, life is precious."

Indigenous people do not support assisted suicide. It goes against their spirituality, and they feel threatened by it. This was a key reason euthanasia legislation in the Northern Territory was overturned.

Senator Patrick Dodson, said regarding WA legislation on assisted suicide:

"As representatives and legislators, surely, we must be focusing our attention to enacting laws that help prolong life and restore the right to enjoy a healthy life. Our endeavours should be directed to enabling all citizens to access the highest quality of health care. It is about priorities, values, and care. The duty of care we saddle those administering and prescribing this system is an onerous one and morally cannot be conveniently shoved off to Government legal drafters.

The Northern Territory experience in the 1990s suggests that the mere presence of this legislation may be a barrier to First Nations peoples receiving healthcare. Fears and suspicions of 'whitefella' medicine will only increase, and the capacity to ascertain informed consent will be difficult.

I admire the dignity with which many have cared for their loved ones to their end. I do not condemn anyone for the choices they make. However, I also believe in the dignity and sanctity of the individual and the importance of not allowing a state to make such a conclusive decision on our common humanity – the power to assist someone in taking their own life."

In June, FamilyVoice is visiting Aboriginal communities in central NSW and Alice Springs to meet with Aboriginal leaders on various issues of concern including VAD.

Recommendation:

We recommend that the Committee hold public hearings in country to hear what indigenous persons have to say. It is simply not good policy formulation process nor sound parliamentary practice to allow a member representing a small inner-city seat to seek to impose a view on a vast state like NSW. The remedy here is to allow the Legislative Council Committee for Law and Justice the opportunity to travel to regional and remote NSW to hold public hearings in country.

2. Can you elucidate on the comments made in your opening statement at the inquiry hearing regarding the implications of the New South Wales Parliament passing the *Voluntary Assisted Dying Bill 2021* and its impact on suicide rates in NSW?

Suicide is currently one of the most critical social issues impacting young and older Australians.

In fact, *Suicide Contagion* is real and Assisted Suicide is part of the problem.

FamilyVoice research shows a disturbing report from the [Patients' Rights Council](#) as follows:

The New York Times investigative team talks about a disturbing discovery on an episode of The Daily podcast titled "*Kids Are Dying How Are These Sites Still Allowed?*" and a companion article called "*Where the Despairing Log On, and Learn Ways to Die*"

The podcast is about websites that exist online where people can access information about how to kill themselves. This information includes methods and recipes for lethal cocktails published by proponents of assisted suicide laws. According to the New York Times reporters, the websites function like social media platforms where users can interact and, tragically, encourage each other.

Some of the stats listed in the episode are astounding. For example, the investigators report that one of these websites gets six million global views per month. That is four times the traffic of the National Suicide Prevention website. The reporters also mention that nearly half of the users on the website are under the age of twenty-five.

Jackie's Story

Shawn Shatto, one of the young people mentioned in the written article, took her own life in 2019 at the age of twenty-five. She used a recipe published on the website discussed in The Daily episode, a recipe which was written by assisted suicide proponents.

Shawn's mother, Jackie, says "Talking about assisted suicide is extremely dangerous, especially when you have the younger kids on there and the vulnerable that feel lost and are in pain. I believe when Shawn went on that website and she saw the way they were talking about ending their lives saying 'Well, you know, it's okay to kill yourself over a terminal illness.' She probably thought 'Yeah, I'm in pain and I'm dealing with this, why can't I die like that too?'"

So how can we prevent suicide when it is promoted as 'Heroic'?

Assisted suicide laws are dangerous to vulnerable people. The highly publicised assisted suicides that proponents promote, and call "heroic" are having a contagion effect. Proponents, in their unfocused drive to legalise, throw caution to the wind by

glamorising assisted suicides and calling it “courageous,” contrary to all media guidelines for reporting on a suicide published by suicide prevention advocates.

They know that acceptance of their dangerous public policy drops dramatically if they do not use their euphemisms and just call it what it is: **suicide**.

Promoting suicide accelerates suicide rates and preys on vulnerable people, people like Shawn referred to above. It needs to stop.

Recommendation:

We recommend that the Committee, in the interests of young Australians, reject the Greenwich VAD Bill and instigate a deeper consultative process for those at risk.

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