

Submission
No 56

**INQUIRY INTO PROVISIONS OF THE VOLUNTARY
ASSISTED DYING BILL 2021**

Organisation: Humanists Australia

Date Received: 22 November 2021

Humanists Australia strongly supports the Voluntary Assisted Dying Bill 2021.

Humanists Australia is a national organisation that exists to educate all Australians about humanism as a framework for an ethical, meaningful and fulfilling life.

We believe that all people deserve to live with dignity and have their individual autonomy protected. This includes the freedom to make personal choices about one's own life.

We urge you to support the voluntary assisted dying (VAD) private member's bill being introduced by Alex Greenwich into the NSW Parliament. New South Wales is now the only Australian state where terminally ill people are denied medical assistance to end their lives despite it being their wish. VAD laws have been passed in Victoria, WA, Tasmania, South Australia, and most recently in Queensland. It is time to fix this glaring inconsistency and **give NSW residents the same rights** as residents of other Australian states to the choice of dignity in death.

Evidence from around the world, including in Victoria where it has been operating for two years, shows that VAD laws operate safely and effectively. In addition to the evidence, **there is overwhelming public support for VAD in Australia** – averaging 80% or higher in the most recent research and polls. The NSW Voluntary Assisted Dying bill has a well-defined process of application and approval. The safeguards throughout the bill provide a sophisticated level of ensuring safety without compromising access.

The VAD laws proposed for NSW are very conservative and only apply to adults with a terminal illness who have decision making capacity. Strong safeguards exist to

protect participants from abuse and coercion. **Voluntary assisted dying is just that - voluntary** - and individuals who are against VAD due to their personal or religious beliefs will not have to use it.

VAD reform in NSW must not be subject to further delays. Right now, **terminally ill people in NSW are suffering**. People in this state must not be left behind and the NSW Parliament cannot ignore it. This issue is not going away. Therefore, we urge you to take this opportunity to support people struggling with unrelenting pain and suffering at the end of their life.

VAD laws need to exist because, **even with the very best palliative care services currently available, not all suffering can be averted**. VAD does not replace or diminish palliative care. It is extremely well evidenced that the act of dying can sadly, all too often, be a long drawn-out process of suffering, panic and pain – often with loved ones watching on. This is not compassionate, dignified or humane and it is why terminally ill people are asking for VAD.

As a national organisation working to promote humanism, reason and evidence, **Humanists Australia strongly believes that assisted dying should be made available to terminally ill people who are incurably suffering**, as long as they have made a clear decision, free from coercion, to end their lives.

Humanists strongly uphold the right to live freely and **to make autonomous choices according to our own wishes and values**, as long as it does no harm to others. We believe strongly in personal autonomy and that people who have made an informed, non-coerced decision to end their own life should not suffer unnecessarily.

Unlike most religious people, humanists do not believe in any god or deity who is the final arbiter in deciding when a person should die. We also do not accept that interference in the course of nature is unnatural, or that experiencing the full dying process is anything more than an individual preference or choice. **It should not be up**



*What will you do with your one wild
and precious life?*

to religious or church groups to impinge on individuals' personal choices about how they live their life, including their end-of-life decisions.

We urge you to **listen to the people of NSW and accept this law**. NSW residents cannot be ignored any longer. Human dignity should not be determined by what jurisdiction people live in, and this bill presents an opportunity to give NSW residents the same rights as residents of other Australian states - the choice of dignity in death.

18th November 2021
