

Dying with Dignity

New South Wales



NEWS | Spring 2022



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President's Message

By now, you will be aware that the NSW Voluntary Assisted Dying (VAD) Bill was finally passed into law on Thursday 19 May 2022. The new law takes effect in November 2023, after an 18 month implementation period.

This was the culmination of decades of persistent lobbying and hard work from many people, not least, the wonderful supporters of Dying with Dignity NSW.

At the time of our last newsletter, the VAD Bill was inching its way through the debate in the NSW Upper House having passed the Lower House with a strong majority in November 2021. We knew that it would be a more difficult process in the Upper House with numbers very tight, parliament distracted by the Federal election and the threat of another COVID wave.

In this newsletter we give our reflections on those stressful last weeks in Parliament and extend our heartfelt thanks to those who played such an important role in achieving this landmark reform. We also give an overview of how VAD laws will work when the regime commences and who will be eligible to use it.

You might be wondering what role there is for Dying with Dignity NSW now that the VAD law has been passed. We have spent the last few months looking to the future and considering how best to focus our time and resources to support the new VAD regime. On page 10 we have outlined our new strategy which will guide us through the period leading up to the implementation of the VAD law in November 2023 and our on-going activities once VAD is available to dying people in NSW.

At the core of our strategy is ensuring that the VAD regime works as intended and is accessible to those who need it, regardless of where they live. We must also ensure that people are aware of their end-of-life rights and have their choices respected.

We have distilled our strategy into 4 key pillars – Support, Educate, Engage and Defend – SEED.

In future newsletters we will provide more updates on the steps we are taking to implement this strategy but we have started with the appointment

of our former Vice President, Shayne Higson, as DWD's Chief Executive Officer.

Many of you will be aware of the incredible contribution Shayne has made in achieving VAD laws, not just in NSW, but also in the successful campaigns in other states and her leadership of the Voluntary Euthanasia Party where she has run as a candidate in 5 elections. Her dedication and persistence were critical to the passage of the NSW Bill and she remains absolutely committed to defending the rights of the terminally ill. Shayne's knowledge of end-of-life issues and the relationships she has built over the last decade will be vital to the execution of our strategy and we're just delighted to see Shayne in this important leadership role.

With VAD laws passed in all states, we were determined to ensure that the residents of the Northern Territory and ACT were not left behind. It is wonderful to see a private members bill before Federal Parliament seeking to overturn the 25 year old law which has prohibited the Territories from passing VAD laws.

At the time of writing, The Restoring Territory Rights Bill 2022 has now passed the House of Representatives and debate is slowly progressing in the Senate. It seems likely that the Bill will pass but the margin is slim and we are keeping fingers and toes crossed for a successful outcome by the end of the year (see page 11).

Bye for now.



As always, thank you for your support,

Penny Hackett

President, DWD NSW

NEWS FROM NEW SOUTH WALES

NSW VAD Bill passes

On Thursday 19 May 2022, the Voluntary Assisted Dying Bill 2021 finally passed NSW Parliament after nearly 50 years of lobbying by Dying with Dignity NSW.

We had rain on most of the days when we rallied outside Parliament House during the debates but on that final day the sun came out and we gathered with the co-sponsors of the Bill for a final press conference on the roof garden.

New South Wales was the sixth and final state to pass an assisted dying law. There is now an 18-month implementation period to allow NSW Health to work with the community and a broad range of health, aged care and other stakeholders to implement the framework set out in the legislation. This is important so they can make sure voluntary assisted dying is safe, accessible and follows the law.

Reflections on the final stages

In our Autumn newsletter, we said we were expecting the VAD Bill to pass the Second Reading vote in the Upper House when Parliament resumed on 11 May and it did, with a majority of 20 votes to 17.

We were very pleased to reach this important milestone but there were still potential obstacles ahead, so we continued to campaign.

VAD Alliance press conference

On the following Tuesday, the day before debate resumed, we held a press conference behind Parliament House bringing together key representatives from an alliance of unions, peak groups and campaign advocates. We called on the NSW Upper House to work together to shut down hostile amendments and to bring on a final vote as soon as possible.



Amendments had been put forward that – if accepted – would have enabled residential aged care facilities and hospitals to put blanket bans on their residents or patients accessing voluntary assisted dying laws.

The groups calling for these amendments to be rejected included the NSW Nurses and Midwives Association, Council on the Ageing NSW, the Health Services Union NSW Branch, Seniors Rights Service and the Older Women's Network NSW along with Dying with Dignity NSW and Go Gentle Australia.

It was disappointing to see hostile amendments being put forward in an attempt to make the law unworkable and more difficult to access for dying people who face unbearable suffering in their last days but these were the same types of tactics opponents had tried, and failed, in other states and during the debate in the NSW Lower House late last year.

Religious bodies, such as Catholic Health Australia, Anglicare and Hammond Care, provide a large proportion of health and aged care services in NSW. They wanted the VAD Bill amended so that their institutions could ban access to VAD for the patients and residents.

In the case of aged care, this would have prevented a resident from accessing a legal medical procedure in their own home, a right which is enshrined in federal legislation.

The NSW legislation, like all the other VAD laws passed around Australia, expressly protected the right of individuals not to be involved. These laws respect the rights of all healthcare workers who wish to conscientiously object. Access to voluntary assisted dying is voluntary for all concerned – both the patients and those who care for them.

In a statement, Rev Simon Hansford, The Moderator of the Uniting Church (NSW and ACT) said in recognition of the deeply held theological and personal views, the Uniting Church (NSW and ACT) would not take an official position on this issue. But the statement went on to say that Uniting were satisfied the Bill offers sufficient protection to residential aged care providers.

The statement quoted Rev Simon Hansford saying “We must remember residential aged care homes are exactly that – people’s homes – and older people deserve the same rights as those in the wider community. Should voluntary assisted dying become law, Uniting would not seek to prevent our residents from using it if that was their wish.”

NSW Nurses and Midwives Association Assistant General Secretary (now General Secretary), Shaye Candish said “A majority of our members support Voluntary Assisted Dying and agree terminally ill people in NSW should be afforded the choice of how and when they die. As health professionals, our members recognise those with an incurable illness should be able to request and consent to the authorised administration of medication to end their life, regardless of where they live. It doesn’t matter whether they live at home, a hospice, hospital or residential aged care, what matters is their eligibility to meet the criteria and their person-centred care is respectful of their individual preferences, needs and values.”



Council of the Ageing NSW CEO, Meagan Lawson said “There should be no differentiation on access to VAD based on a person’s residential address. Older people living in an aged care facility should have the same rights to access VAD as those living in the wider community. This is their home. Their personal autonomy and right to choose should not be forfeited when entering aged care.”

Older Women's Network Chair, Beverly Baker said “It is unacceptable for older people living in aged care facilities to be denied access to the right to VAD just because their providers don’t believe it’s right for them.

Older people who live in aged care facilities should not be treated as second class citizens. These facilities are now their homes, and providers should not be telling them what they can and can't do in relation to their medical care and choice of VAD. It's a personal matter which is up to the older person. We've had enough of providers not doing the right thing by their residents. This just adds insult to injury."

Gerard Hayes, HSU NSW Secretary, stated that when they conducted a survey of HSU members on this issue, over 89% were in support of voluntary assisted dying laws. He said that "These are members who work as Paramedics, aged care workers and public and private health care workers. They are on the frontline seeing the suffering of patients. We support the introduction of voluntary assisted dying laws on that basis and we support increased funding to palliative care".

Fortunately thanks to pressure from Dying with Dignity NSW, Go Gentle Australia and other VAD Alliance members, combined with sensible arguments from supporters of the legislation within NSW Parliament, the hostile amendments were quashed.

Final Upper House debate

On Wednesday 18 May 2022, the Upper House moved onto the Committee stage of the debate where the long list of amendments were considered.

Our dedicated supporters, once again rallied outside to send a strong message that we expected a final vote by the end of the day. We asked members of the Upper House to work together to resolve any amendments in a productive and timely way bearing in mind that there were people in NSW with terminal illnesses who didn't have time to wait.

Many of the co-sponsors of the Voluntary Assisted Dying Bill came outside to thank Dying with Dignity supporters including Labor MLC John Graham (pictured on the next column).



The debate dragged on through the night and just when we thought the end was in sight, Robert Borsak from the Shooters, Fishers and Farmers Party decided to block a motion to extend the sitting past midnight. With just one more clause to deal with before the final vote, debate was deferred until the next day.

After an anxious night, the Bill finally passed the Upper House - 23 votes to 15 - on Thursday morning, 19 May 2022.

Within the hour, the Bill was taken back to the Lower House to be ratified. The public gallery was filled with our supporters who have spent many years fighting for the rights of the terminally ill. Moments later, accompanied by applause and tears of relief, the NSW VAD Bill was passed into a robust and conservative law which will give dying people in NSW the same rights as those in all other Australian states.

The NSW Voluntary Assisted Dying Act 2022 will give an immense sense of hope and relief to many people with a terminal illness who simply want to take back some control at the end of their lives.



A big “thank you”

There are many people who we would like to thank for this momentous achievement. Firstly, our wonderful members and supporters. Even if you weren't one of the hundreds of supporters who rallied in front of Parliament House last year, or earlier this year, many of you contributed to the campaign by donating, volunteering at our community stalls, sharing your personal stories in emails to your MPs, or writing letters to the editor. Whatever contribution each of you made, we know we could not have achieved our goal without you.

We wish to thank the directors of Dying with Dignity NSW, past and present, for their dedication and persistence. In particular, the current directors – Liz Jacka, Geoff Usher, Fiona Jackson-Walker, Dee Johnson, Debbie Ditchfield, Julie Hanley, David Pieper, Jan Edwards and although she died before seeing our NSW law pass, the late Judith Daley as well as our newest directors, Stephanie Short and Heath Reed. Although not on the Board itself, we would also like to acknowledge the contribution of Carmel Molloy from the Non-Profit Alliance and our administrator Sandi Steep.

Hopefully our very modest President, Penny Hackett, will not edit out this part of the newsletter because it is important to highlight how incredible it has been to have someone like Penny leading this organisation over the past five years. Penny put an enormous effort into the VAD campaign, putting most of her working life and her personal life on hold so that she could leave no stone unturned. It wasn't just here in NSW; many people may not realise that Penny supported many of the interstate DWD's as well. Obviously, we knew that assisting those campaigns could only help NSW reach its goal, but she really went above and beyond. I look forward to working with Penny in the coming months and years in my new role as part-time CEO, as we shift focus and implement our new strategic plan (see page 10).

We wish to thank Andrew Denton and his team at Go Gentle Australia – Steve Offner, Kiki Paul, Frankie Bennett and Renae Titchmarsh. They joined us late in the NSW campaign because they were heavily involved in the other interstate campaigns, but it made such a difference having

their help and expertise when it counted most.

We would also like to thank all the members of the NSW VAD Alliance. To have peak organisations including the NSW Nurses and Midwives Association, Council on the Ageing NSW, the Health Services Union NSW Branch, Cancer Voices NSW and the Older Women's Network NSW lobbying MPs, in addition to our efforts, was so important.

We want to thank the 28 co-sponsors of the NSW VAD Bill. This was the largest number of co-sponsors for any piece of legislation in Australian parliamentary history, state or federal, and the person we need to thank, more than anyone else, for achieving this record number, and for getting this law reform done, especially in the current term of parliament, is Alex Greenwich, the independent member for Sydney.

By the end of 2020, after two years of grassroots campaigning, Dying with Dignity NSW, and our supporters, really needed to be given some sort of hope and our knight in shining armour was Alex Greenwich. In December 2020, Alex publicly announced that he would begin the process of drafting an assisted dying law for NSW that could be debated in this term of Parliament.

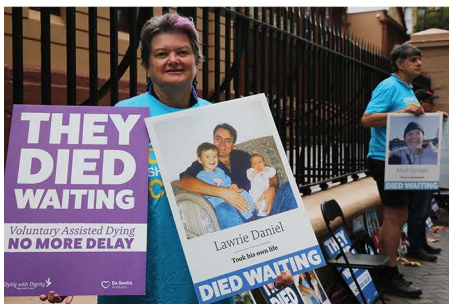
By making that announcement at the end of the year, Alex gave his parliamentary colleagues plenty of time over the summer months to consider their positions on this issue.

When Parliament resumed in early 2021 he began conversations with his colleagues and we continued our lobbying.

Throughout the whole process, Alex kept all his promises – releasing draft legislation, consulting key stakeholders and all the while keeping DWD informed of progress. We could not be more impressed by Alex as a politician – he was patient, optimistic, intelligent, and respectful. Despite having many demands on his time, he always made us feel like we were the most important people he was dealing with and assisted dying was the most important issue.



THANK YOU TO OUR DEDICATED VOLUNTEERS



The list of people to thank could go on and on – but we must make special mention of Adam Searle MLC, who so skilfully navigated the passage of the Bill through the Upper House, Greg Piper, the Independent MP for Lake Macquarie and Greg and Alex's outstanding policy advisers, Tammie Nardone and Jason Gordon. We cannot be more grateful for your expertise and support.

To everyone listed and the thousands who are not,
THANK YOU!

When and how can someone access VAD?

The NSW Voluntary Assisted Dying (VAD) Act will take effect on 28 November 2023. This means terminally ill residents in NSW will still need to wait for another year before they can access VAD. We know that many people will be disappointed that it won't be available sooner, however, there is a lot of planning and implementation required to make sure the regime operates in accordance with the Act and that both patients and practitioners are very clear on the process.

From 28 November 2023, people who are experiencing intolerable suffering at the end of their life, and who meet the strict eligibility criteria, will be able to follow the highly safeguarded process and hopefully access VAD, if that is their wish.

Like all Australian VAD laws, the NSW VAD Act is a very detailed piece of legislation. Readers can view the full, 84-page document on our website here – NSW Voluntary Assisted Dying Act.

Here is a summary of the main eligibility criteria and some of the key safeguards within the process.

Eligibility criteria

For someone to be able to access VAD in NSW, they'll need to meet the eligibility criteria, which is:

- They must be an adult (18 years and older), who is an Australian citizen, a permanent resident of Australia, or has been resident in Australia for at least 3 continuous years.
- They must have been living in NSW for at least 12 months.

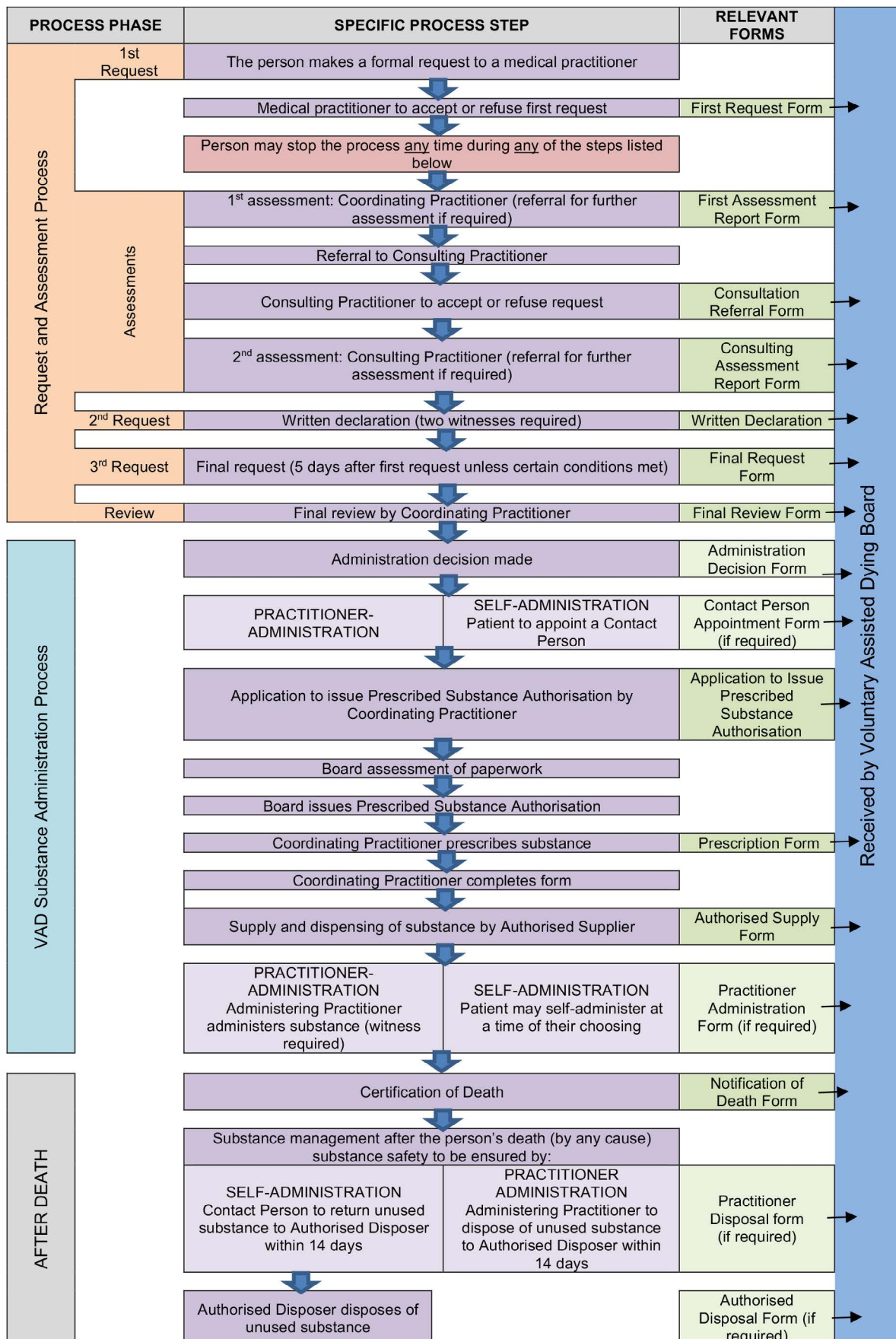
- They must have at least one disease, illness or medical condition that is advanced, progressive that will, on the balance of probabilities, cause their death within six months (or within 12 months for neurodegenerative diseases like motor neurone disease), and is causing suffering that cannot be relieved in a way the person considers tolerable.
- The person must have decision-making capacity in relation to voluntary assisted dying.
- The person must be acting voluntarily.
- The person must not be acting because of pressure or duress.
- The person's request for access to voluntary assisted dying has to be enduring.

The process (key points)

- In order to access this compassionate, end-of-life choice, the dying person themselves must make the request. It cannot be made by a family member, a carer or anyone else.
- A request cannot be made in an advance care directive because the person has to have decision-making capacity throughout the whole process.
- The person has to make three requests and one has to be in writing.
- There has to be two witnesses to the written request.
- Assessment of criteria for access has to be carried out by two independent medical practitioners who have to meet minimum requirements regarding their qualifications and experience and they have to have done special VAD training.
- All doctors will be trained in recognising the signs of pressure or duress and if they are unsure whether a patient is acting voluntarily, or whether pressure or duress could be a factor, they must refer the patient to someone who has the skills and training to make a determination. This could be a psychiatrist, psychologist, social worker or the police depending on the circumstances.





To view the full Voluntary Assisted Dying Act 2021 visit our website at - <https://dwdnsw.org.au/nsw-vad-legislation/>

Flow Chart of Process for NSW Voluntary Assisted Dying Act



Strategic review

We have spent the last couple of months considering how we can best meet our key aim of ensuring access to voluntary assisted dying. We have developed our new strategic plan around four key pillars – Support, Educate, Engage and Defend.

			
Support	Educate	Engage	Defend
Provide support and advice to individuals, family members and carers facing end-of-life situations and decisions.	Educate the public, health-care providers and other stakeholders about the new VAD law and EOL planning.	Engage in the NSW VAD implementation process through communication with the Dept of Health.	Monitor opponents' activities and take defensive action as required.
Refer people to other organisations that can provide specialist support, information and resources.	Build relationships with medical bodies and other organisations concerned with EOL issues.	Help recruit medical practitioners to undertake the training and to provide VAD to eligible individuals.	Maintain a strong media and political presence by continuing to collect and publish testimonies.
Provide helpful information via a phone and email support service, webinars, seminars, the website, newsletters and brochures.	Pursue opportunities to collaborate with other organisations providing educational, EOL resources to avoid duplication.	Monitor the VAD scheme by collecting data and monitoring access once the scheme is operational.	Help ensure access to VAD in faith-based health and aged care facilities.
Strengthen regional groups to ensure that support can be provided in regional areas across NSW.	Organise or participate in end-of-life seminars, events etc to educate the public about all EOL choices and rights.	Strengthen relationships with existing VAD Alliance members and other important stakeholders.	Work with interstate DWDs and other advocacy groups to protect and potentially improve all Australian VAD laws.

Our Strategic Plan will be supported by annual operating plans setting out actions to progress each of the identified objectives and priorities. All of our strategies will include respectful dialogue, effective partnerships and strengthening of our regional groups.



Respectful dialogue

Now that VAD laws have passed, we will endeavour to build new relationships even with groups that may have opposed these laws through respectful dialogue.



Partnering effectively

Partnerships are important as we look to broaden our impact and avoid duplication. Maintaining strategic relationships will be critical to achieving our goals.



Maintain community

Engage the community to ensure continued support for our ongoing work supporting people at the end of their lives. This will involve strengthening our regional groups.

NEWS FROM AROUND THE COUNTRY

The Territories

After NSW's Voluntary Assisted Dying (VAD) law was passed, meaning that VAD will be available in every Australian state, attention moved more firmly to trying to ensure that Australians who live in the two territories – the Northern Territory (NT) and the Australian Capital Territory (ACT) have that right too. Readers will remember that the NT was the first place in Australia to legislate for VAD way back in 1995, and the law operated there for about 18 months before the Federal Government saw fit to legislate to prohibit the territories from passing VAD laws, thus upending the NT law.

Once the first state VAD law was passed in Victoria in 2017 and campaigns began in other states, Territorians too took up the fight to have the Commonwealth ban overturned. Several attempts were made in the federal parliament with a bill sponsored by the Greens Senator Richard Di Natale, another by Senator David Leyonhjelm and a third one by NT Senator Sam McMahon, but none succeeded.

Campaigners were very excited during the recent federal election campaign when the then Leader of the Opposition, Anthony Albanese, indicated that he was in favour of overturning the Territories' ban. In addition, MPs and senators from the territories, as well as election candidates such as David Pocock (subsequently elected to be an ACT senator) took up the cause energetically. Happily, the new Federal Government made the issue a priority and legislation was introduced into the House of Representatives as soon as Parliament resumed in August. A private members bill, proposed by Northern Territory MP, Luke Gosling and Australian Capital Territory MP, Alicia Payne, was introduced on 1 August. Despite Luke Gosling's plea that the legislation not be treated as a proxy vote on VAD, those who voted against it did so because they don't want the NT and ACT to be able to enact VAD laws. The Restoring Territory Rights Bill 2022 passed the Legislative Assembly on 2 August by 99 votes to 37, a decisive margin. MPs were given

a conscience vote on the issue. The Bill was then introduced into the Senate on 5 September. Some debate of the Bill has taken place with 20 of the 76 Senators giving their Second Reading speeches. Of that 20, 12 have indicated that they will support the legislation, 7 will vote against it and one Senator, Pat Dodson, will abstain. Indications are that the vote in the Senate will be much closer than in the Legislative Assembly. The debate is due to resume in October and it is hoped that a final vote will occur before the end of the year.

Victoria

Dying with Dignity Victoria is the trail blazer when it comes to voluntary assisted dying in Australia. They led with the first state law back in 2017 and they continue to inspire us with the way they have transformed their organisation in order to support the new regime. They provide education, a witness program and many other initiatives that we hope to replicate in NSW throughout the implementation phase over the next 12 months and beyond, once our law comes into effect.

Dr Cam McLaren, one of the most dedicated VAD doctors in Victoria and a director of DWDV has launched a new website – VADANZ and it looks great. It is a peer network of medical professionals who provide support and resources for those who are providing VAD services in Australia and New Zealand. Their goal is to ensure every practitioner is equipped with medical, practical and professional support services they need to administer this important service to their patients.

Another dedicated VAD doctor and DWDV director, Dr Nick Carr, commenced legal action recently against the federal Attorney-General to challenge the Carriage Service law that prevents VAD doctors using Telehealth.

DWDV have begun work on the 5-year review of the regime and are listing areas they consider to be of most concern. They are also collecting personal stories/relevant articles pertaining to these issues.

Western Australia

WA's VAD law has been operating for more than a year now and, according to DWDWA President Steve Walker, while the terms of the WA Act did not go as far as some of their supporters might have wished, it is a tremendous advance in providing choice to many at the end of life, and it has worked well so far. "The Department of Health, as well as the doctors who have provided wonderful support to many people, are to be congratulated and commended for their work," said Mr Walker.

Like Victoria, DWDWA continue to monitor the operation of their Act, providing assistance where they can, for example with witnessing written VAD requests and providing advice and information to the community. They are also preparing strategies for the review of their Act, which is to be conducted in the second half of 2023.

DWDWA feel strongly that their members and supporters, and the community at large, should have the opportunity to highlight the ways their law can and should be improved.

In other news, the Health Department has recently released a revised Advance Care Directive form and other resources for end-of-life planning.

Tasmania

In Tasmania, the implementation process has been completed and their VAD law became operational on 23 October 2022. The Tasmanian doctors seem happy with the education modules and according to the Convenor of Doctors for Assisted Dying Choice, 10 doctors have so far signed up to do the training. Remuneration for doctors however remains an issue.

Dying with Dignity Tasmania held their AGM in August and their guest speaker was the Team Leader of the VAD Navigation Service.

The Health Department held public information sessions about VAD with speakers from the Implementation Team, the VAD Pharmacy Service, Navigation Service, the VAD Commission and also some interstate speakers. This event was meant to be streamed but unfortunately that option was withdrawn.

South Australia

In South Australia, the recent activity of our sister organisation, Voluntary Assisted Dying SA (VADSA), has been focused on achieving a 2022 commencement date. At this stage the start date is listed as 31 January 2023, which will make SA the slowest state in Australia in the roll out of VAD.

Attorney-General Kyam Maher said he was "doing all in his power" to escalate the implementation of the laws. He said the delay is due to the training required in health settings including the delivery of substances by pharmacists, and IT systems to make the process lawful.

"We can't compromise on the safety of the scheme, that would undermine people's confidence, but we are doing everything we can to bring it forward," he said.

Queensland

Queensland's VAD law is due to commence on 1 January 2023. Dying with Dignity Queensland (DWDQ) continues to have a good relationship with the Queensland VAD Implementation Team and a number of their committee members hold positions on a variety of working groups.

There has been steady progress through the implementation phase. The State Navigator Service will be known as QVAD Support and this will be the first port of call for anyone with questions about how to access VAD. They will support a patient (and their family, care providers and doctors) throughout the process, including referral on to accredited practitioners if needed.

A Q-VAD handbook has been developed. This is the "go to" place on Queensland Health's website for everything a health worker or facility may need to know about VAD – including all guidelines, protocols and forms

A Queensland VAD Implementation Conference for health workers was held on 29 October 2022. The program includes a keynote address from Andrew Denton, insights from interstate, case scenarios, and an overview of VAD.

WHAT'S HAPPENING OVERSEAS

In Canada a parliamentary committee is considering the question of how to extend Medical Aid in Dying (MAiD) to include mental illness following a court decision ruling that excluding the mentally ill was discriminatory. This committee issued its report in June. It incorporated findings from the expert panel concluded that “the existing eligibility criteria in Canada’s MAiD scheme would be adequate” when extended to those with mental disorders. Accordingly, the parliamentary committee gave the go-ahead to people with mental disorders to be included in the MAiD scheme by March 2023, as mandated by the court. However, it calls for “standards of practice, clear guidelines, adequate training for practitioners, comprehensive patient assessments and meaningful oversight” to be implemented well ahead of this deadline.

Ever since the court handed down the decision that mental illnesses must be included, debate has raged in Canada among both the medical profession and the public. The removal of the provision for “death to be reasonably foreseeable” has also caused controversy, with some media outlets reporting that people are being approved for MAiD just because they lack the medical and social supports for a viable existence. Such reports have not been verified and Dying With Dignity Canada assure us that they know of no abuses of Canada’s MAiD scheme. Several Canadian newspapers are running campaigns against the MAiD extensions and the same stories are being recycled over and over again despite there being no evidence that they are accurate. Canada is certainly in the forefront of assisted dying developments and here in Australia both opponents and advocates are watching the situation closely.

There are encouraging developments in other parts of the world.

Both Korea and Mexico have begun discussing the need for a VAD scheme. In Italy, following a Constitutional Court decision that assisting someone to die is permitted in certain

circumstances, a man who was paralysed from the neck down was able to have an assisted death.

Germany intends to introduce legislation to regulate VAD following a High Court decision that assisted dying is permissible provided it is done for the right reasons.

There is considerable progress in France, where President Emmanuel Macron announced after his re-election that he wanted France to have an assisted dying scheme along the lines of the one in Belgium. He is contemplating establishing a Citizen’s Convention to discuss and to make recommendations about the form such a scheme should take. The issue was highlighted by the fact that iconic French film director, Jean Luc Godard, received an assisted death in Switzerland at the age of 91.

In the United Kingdom (UK) and Ireland things are moving at a snail’s pace. In the UK in July a petition with 100,000 signatures in support of VAD was presented to the parliament which forced a debate in the House of Commons. Predictably, the vote to introduce a VAD bill was lost. However, the campaign continues, and it is only a matter of time before the UK gets a law. It will be interesting to see whether having a new Prime Minister helps the cause, or at least doesn’t block it.

In Scotland Member of the Scottish Parliament, Liam McArthur, is intending to introduce a bill to make VSAD available to mentally competent adults with a terminal illness. He conducted a wide consultation on the issue and received over 14,000 responses, over three quarters of which were in favour of such a law. A previous bill which was debated in 2015 and rejected by 82 votes to 36 but McArthur says the composition of the parliament has changed considerably and he detects wide support across all parties. So, Scotland may get a law before the UK does.

OTHER GROUPS

Central Coast Group

Four local Members of Parliament joined about fifty Dying with Dignity members and supporters at a lively meeting held on Monday 27 June 2022 to celebrate the successful passing of the Voluntary Assisted Dying (VAD) Bill by the NSW Parliament on 19 May 2022.

Three State MPs – Liesl Tesch (ALP, Gosford), David Mehan (ALP, The Entrance) and Adam Crouch (Liberal, Terrigal), were joined by the newly-elected Labor Federal Member for Robertson, Dr Gordon Reid, at the event, held at the Central Coast Leagues Club.

Shayne Higson, Vice-President of Dying with Dignity NSW, and long-time campaigner for legalising VAD, gave a detailed and much-appreciated update on the successful campaign and legislation.

The Bill had 28 co-sponsors (including two Central Coast politicians, Liesl Tesch and David Mehan) more than any other legislation in Australia.

Refreshments were enjoyed after the formal meeting and the chance to socialise was very much appreciated after the historic win on May 19, and a chance to recognise the hard work, dedication and commitment of the active Committee members, grass-roots supporters and politicians on the Central Coast for over 25 years.

Dr Beverley Symons and Dr Stephanie Short

Christians Supporting Choice for VAD

I fully endorse the thanks expressed on the previous pages to all those MPs, DWD and its volunteers, Go Gentle Australia and many others who helped get the NSW Voluntary Assisted Dying Law passed.

Our group is now waiting for a final vote on the Federal Parliament's 'Restoring Territory Rights

Bill.' We recognise that this Bill would simply restore to the Territories their right to pass a VAD law, a right taken away by what is known as the Andrews Bill under the Howard Government.

It is encouraging that Senator Hume (Victorian Liberal) who voted against previous attempts to restore Territory rights on this issue, has said in an emotional speech that this time she would support the Bill. Senator Hume attributed her change of heart to her father's experience with VAD in Victoria following his cancer diagnosis. Going through this process with her father reassured her that the safeguards were robust. "He died peacefully, as he died painlessly, as he died willingly and in the manner in which he wanted, the manner in which he had always wanted, and at the time of his choosing, I now feel very, very differently. It was truly a beautiful death."

Sadly we need to be aware that conservative Christian groups will be doing their best to frustrate and even overturn the progress made in passing a VAD law in Australia. This is despite around 3 out of 4 Australian Christians supporting this compassionate end of life choice!

I close with a brief tribute to my friend Tanya Battel from Queensland. Motivated by a diagnosis of stage 4 breast cancer, Tanya and her 'gang of four' played a significant role in the passing of the Queensland VAD law. I was pleased that I was able to work with Tanya, as she amassed over 110,000 signatures in support of VAD on her petition to the QLD Parliament. We also worked to pass on her personal experience on the issue to MPs in NSW and in SA. Tanya Battel – dubbed a 'superstar VAD advocate' – ended her life, on her own terms, in Switzerland, in August 2022.

In spite of the passing of VAD laws, we urge you to please join us if you are not a member, and to stay with us if you are a member.

Ian Wood, Spokesperson, Christians Supporting Choice for Voluntary Assisted Dying, <https://christiansforvad.org.au>

NEW BOOK - EVIL CONJECTURES

DWD Supporters invited to book launch

Dr Stephen Edwards was arrested in 2016 for the murder of his mother. He spent three months in jail and a further four years on bail in Tasmania before the case was dropped.

Edwards, a former general practitioner who specialised in nursing home patients and palliative care, was deregistered after the charge of euthanising his mother was brought against him.

The case was closed after he was diagnosed with terminal cancer and given six to thirteen months to live in January 2020. He was never able to clear his name.

The story of how Edwards was charged with conspiring with his brother to murder his mother confronts the most fundamental questions of life and death, magnified by his own diagnosis of terminal cancer which he stubbornly refuses to accept.

His incarceration in Tasmania's notorious Risdon Prison brought him into direct contact with mass murderer Martin Bryant as well as enduring the inequities and perverse injustices of the prison system. Dubbed 'Dr Death' by his fellow inmates, he nevertheless earned their respect.

Edwards insists he is the victim of a gross miscarriage of justice for which, since Lindy Chamberlain and before, Australia, unlike many countries, has no formal system of review.

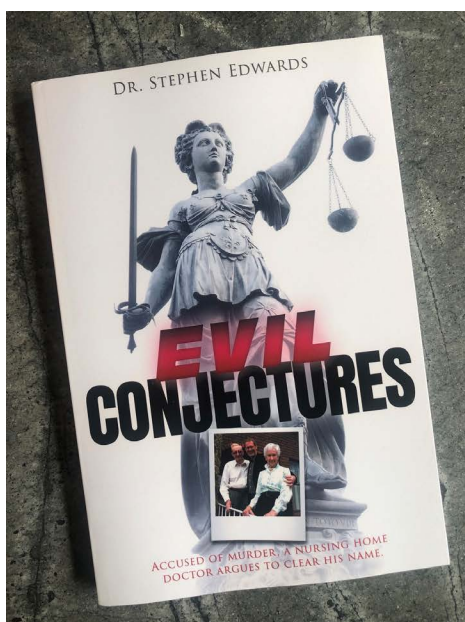
For all those interested in the debates around assisted dying, this is a must read. "It's a story etched in the grey of the blurred ethical and legal lines Doctors confront when treating the elderly or the very sick in that last, often trying, stage of life." Jamie Walker, The Australian

"This is a story every Australian should read because it is bound to replay in all our lives one day, in one way or another. Take up Stephen Edwards' challenge and decide for yourself whether he was right or wronged." Associate Editor, The Australian.

"The book confronts fundamental questions of life and death illustrated by the moving stories of some of the elderly people and families he counselled as they faced end of life decisions." Charles Freyberg, Poet.

Evil Conjectures is now available at all major online outlets, including Amazon and iBooks, as well as Booktopia, Australia's largest online bookseller.

For further inquiries contact the author directly on 0413 935 013 or at sedwardss@hotmail.com



BOOK
LAUNCH
6pm
Wed 9th November

Kings Cross
Community Centre
50-58 Macleay St, Potts Point

All Welcome

MAKING A DONATION

We are totally reliant on membership fees, donations and bequests to operate. We are now a registered charity so all donations over \$2 are tax deductible.

Donations can be made via our website –



For more information

Visit www.dwdnsw.org.au



Alternatively, you can make a donation via our other payment options.

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PO BOX 25

BROADWAY NSW 2007

Or scan the completed form and email the copy to us at dwd@dwdnsw.org.au

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