

President's Report

Wow, it has been an incredibly busy few months and I think we all need some time to catch our breath. This year marks our 50th anniversary and June 19th marked the 5th year of Voluntary Assisted Dying operation in Victoria. These were huge milestones for which we considered a celebration mandatory. We celebrated on June 19th at Parliament House. Unfortunately numbers were restricted by the confines of parliamentary walls and our budget!

We were absolutely thrilled to see individuals from 'all walks of VAD life' joining us. Their enthusiasm to celebrate all that has been achieved in the last 50 years, helping those suffering unnecessarily at the end-of-life and the collective fervent desire to see future legislative reform of our VAD legislation, was very emotional. The innate connection between all those in attendance was palpable and created a very special atmosphere. It was wonderful to see some MPs who had been involved in the 2017 VAD debate. Their contribution to the successful passage of VAD, and that of others unable to attend, will never be forgotten. Some had publicly shared their intensely personal and tragic family stories, and other MPs had stepped aside from the VAD stance of their political party, exemplifying how a conscience vote should work. I would like to thank our General Manager Natalie King, Young Ambassador Olivia Nicholls, and Board members Danielle Clarke and Michelle Hindson for everything they did to make the evening such a success.

We have seen a frenzy of media activity focused on VAD. This resulted from a three full page interview in 'The Age' with Cheryl Barassi, wife of former AFL legend Ron Barassi. She courageously provided a heartfelt and frank account of Ron's death last year and what has unfurled in her life this year. Over the following few days, 'The Age' received a deluge of letters in response. Two more VAD articles were published in 'The Age' on successive days, culminating with a brilliant editorial calling for reforms to Victoria's VAD legislation.

Copies of Rodney Syme's book, 'A Completed Life' continue to be sold and we are nearing the 900 sales mark. This is a fabulous outcome, but we would still like to see many more copies out in the public arena informing people about the critical issues of dementia, aged care and the concept of a completed life.

We were very sorry to say goodbye to two of our Board members. Mark Newstead joined the DWDV board in

November 2009. We thank him for his contribution over the 15 years, in his roles as Secretary and later Treasurer. We wish Mark all the best in his next chapter of life. Oncologist Dr Cam McLaren joined us in November 2019. Cam, as most of you will know, has gone above and beyond in his role as a VAD provider. He is held in high esteem by colleagues around Australia and the world and we have heard many stories, from relatives whose loved ones accessed VAD, about Cam's kindness and infinite compassion for all those who had the privilege of meeting him. We wish Cam well with VADANZ, an organization he founded representing multidisciplinary health care professionals providing VAD service in Australia and New Zealand.



Jane Morris

I would like to thank Tiffany Papas who is helping us with our social media sites. She is to be congratulated on the work she has done so far. We are also working on some other very exciting programs, that you will soon hear about. Our witnessing program has proved to be an unimaginable success. In August we will have contributed to 500 'witnessings'. This remarkable number has only been achieved because of our wonderful volunteers and our General Manager, Natalie King.

As always, DWDV is indebted to our fabulous members, supporters, associated colleagues and those who are no longer here, but provided us with their trust and support.



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Dying With Dignity Victoria Celebrates Its 50th Anniversary!

Fifty years ago, a group of courageous individuals formed the Voluntary Euthanasia Society of Victoria (VESV). This incredibly successful entity, now known as Dying With Dignity Victoria, has achieved so much in the intervening years in its pursuit of reducing the interminable and irremediable suffering of those at the end of life. June 19th this year marked exactly five years of Voluntary Assisted Dying operation in Victoria. DWDV could not let these events pass unnoticed and decided a celebration was mandatory.

The obvious location was the Victorian Parliament House and it seemed that the stars were aligned in our favour as we were able to book a venue there on June 19th. We were extremely grateful to Victorian MLC, Ryan Batchelor, for agreeing to host our event and for generously referring to the evening in Parliament the next day!

Unfortunately, we were restricted with numbers and unable to invite the many individuals who have significantly helped our cause over the decades.

We were absolutely delighted that the Victorian Health Minister Mary-Anne Thomas agreed to speak as well as Andrew Denton, who described all the threads that had contributed to Victoria's successful passage of 2017. He was extremely generous in his praise for all those involved but emphasised the critical role that DWDV had played.

Amongst our guests were former politicians who had played integral roles in the 2017 Victorian Voluntary Assisted Dying Parliamentary debate, other MPs who had played a major role in prior attempts to see VAD legislation passed and current MPs who gave up their valuable time to attend.

We had doctors who played an enormous role in VAD advocacy and those that are current VAD providers. We were so pleased to see some journalists, who have been incredibly supportive of our cause over the years, accept our invitation. VAD navigators and stoic individuals who had selflessly shared their heart-rending stories with us, were also in attendance.

It meant a lot to us that past DWDV Committee members were able to participate and deservedly celebrate all that they had incredibly achieved, most notably Robert Young, Helga Kuhse, Max Sutherland, Neil Francis, Judith Hoy and Lesley Vick.



*DWDV Board Members with the Young Ambassadors, Melbourne, Wednesday 19th June 2024
Image : Penny Stephens*

We were so very grateful to those who had travelled from interstate - Andrew Denton, Dr Linda Swan and Kiki Paul from Go Gentle Australia, Anne Bunning and Frances Coombe from VADSA, Marianne Bowdler from Griefline, Paediatric Neurosurgeon Brian Owler (who chaired the 2017 Victorian VAD Ministerial Advisory Panel), and Julian Gardner AM (who Chairs the Victorian VAD Review Board).

Of course, I could go on and on and list those who sadly were unable to attend because of illness.

The scene that night was however incomplete, the picture was missing its centrepiece, the great Dr Rodney Syme. Fortunately, his daughter Robin was able to be there to listen to the many accolades and praises afforded to Rodney. His absence was noted by all. It was a terrific night, and everyone commented about the genuine connection of all those in attendance.

It was for most of us a very emotional evening and many tears were shed. The highlight of the night was undoubtedly a presentation given by DWDV board member Danielle Clarke who introduced to those in the room news about a very exciting project of ours, the creation of the Young Ambassadors group. Danielle's speech included a short video about this dynamic young group of incredible individuals. The feedback since has been overwhelming.

We would love to have been able to invite many other people and perhaps in hindsight should have hired the MCG!

We are so grateful and appreciative of all our supporters and colleagues/friends from the other DWD organizations around Australia and indeed, other countries around the world.

It is such a great honour to be part of such a dynamic team.

Celebrating 50 years ...



A Potpourri of Updates ...

In case you missed them, here is a selection of items that have been added under the DWDV website's News section since our last newsletter. Visit our website to read about them in more detail!

Cherryl Barassi calls for improved VAD laws as she shares her story

On June 11th, The Age reported a tragic story highlighting the urgent need for reform in Victoria's Voluntary Assisted Dying (VAD) legislation. Currently, not everyone suffering at the end of life is eligible for VAD, denying them a gentle and humane death.



The Age's Editorial on Victoria's Voluntary Assisted Dying Legislation

Following the media attention from Cherryl Barassi's story, The Age received multiple letters from the public, one of which was from our President, Jane Morris. In response to the flood of public letters, The Age published an editorial piece on June 15th, discussing Victoria's VAD laws. Entitled "Victoria's assisted dying laws need updating", the piece discussed that whilst Victoria was once a "trailblazer" for assisted-dying legislation, it has now "...fallen behind other jurisdictions with such laws..."

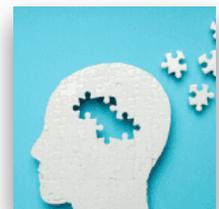
Late Professor Arnold Gillespie Honoured with Order of Australia award

From South Australia, the late Professor Arnold Gillespie was awarded an Order of Australia for his significant service to medicine, particularly for his advocacy for voluntary assisted dying (VAD). It is wonderful to see his work deservedly acknowledged.



Dementia and assisted dying: It's time to change the law

Matty Silver's article 'Time to change the law' was published in John Menadue's Public Policy Journal on June 10. In this very stirring article, Silver recounts the diagnosis of one of her closest friends with dementia. Her friend had read Dr Rodney Syme's posthumously published book, 'A Completed Life' and was further devastated to realise that this scenario could be her future.



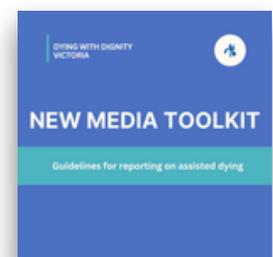
Dr. Nick Carr Discusses Assisted Dying on ABC Radio

On June 12th, Dr. Nick Carr, known for his unwavering commitment to the topic of VAD, participated in an insightful interview on ABC Radio's Life Matters. Joining him was Dr. Eliana Close, Senior Research Fellow at QUT, in a discussion titled 'Balancing choice and protection: what are best ways to regulate voluntary assisted dying?' The interview addressed critical aspects of VAD legislation, with Dr. Carr's perspective highlighted from the 7:20 minute mark.



New Guidelines Released for Assisted Dying Reporting

A comprehensive media toolkit has been released to ensure consistent and sensitive reporting on matters related to assisted dying. The aim of this toolkit is to standardise the way Voluntary Assisted Dying (VAD) topics are covered in the media, ensuring accuracy, empathy, and respect in every report. This initiative comes as part of ongoing efforts to uphold journalistic integrity and ethical reporting practices in discussions surrounding sensitive topics such as end-of-life decisions. By providing journalists with clear guidelines and resources, the toolkit aims uphold the dignity of individuals and families involved in VAD cases. Dying With Dignity Victoria values the feedback of our community and invites you to share your thoughts.



A Potpourri of Updates (cont.)

The Northern Territory is Now the Only Jurisdiction Without VAD

Suzanne James' article, *Treated like second-class citizens: NT awaits VAD law as ACT makes progress*, was published on Green Left on June 14th. Suzanne is a dedicated advocate of voluntary assisted dying, offering a comprehensive overview of the situation in the Northern Territory (NT).



Residency Requirements and Assisted Dying - What Needs To Change?

Keane Bourke, ABC's WA state political reporter, wrote about how residency requirements in assisted-dying laws, initially meant to prevent 'death tourism', are affecting people like Marion. The article explores Marion's story - how despite living in Western Australia for most of her life, is now being denied access to VAD after being diagnosed with an aggressive cancer. Marion said "The Voluntary Assisted Dying Act needs to be seriously reviewed so that another person and their family, in a similar situation, don't have to go through what I and my partner and family have had to."



Residential Aged Care Providers and VAD Requests: Fact Sheet

Critical information for all those living in or intending to move into residential aged care. A wonderful fact sheet has been released (by the Aged Care Quality and Safety Commission) outlining the responsibilities residential aged care providers have when a resident wants to find out information about, or wants to access, Voluntary Assisted Dying (VAD). VAD laws in each state differ however, in all states, a residential aged care provider needs to respect an older person's choice to access VAD services. "Living in a residential aged care service does not impact a person's right and ability to choose to access VAD. Residents have the right to choose to access VAD even where the provider has made the decision not to participate in the VAD process. This also applies to states (such as Victoria) where there is no obligation for a provider to directly facilitate access to VAD services."



Dementia: Eligibility for Voluntary Assisted Dying in Australia

Currently, dementia is not included in Voluntary Assisted Dying (VAD) legislation. In a survey conducted by Dying With Dignity Victoria, 76% of survey respondents agreed that dementia should be a recognised medical condition for accessing VAD. We share a resource prepared by Voluntary Assisted Dying NGO network, Australia and New Zealand, which goes into great detail about this issue. As the article states, there are three key aspects of state VAD legislation which make it difficult for a person with dementia to access VAD.



The Right to Die with Dignity

Victor Tse AccS(Com), principal solicitor and mediator at Victor Tse & Associates, published an article on Voluntary Assisted Dying in the March 2024 edition of the Law Institute Journal. He discusses the fact that current Voluntary Assisted Dying laws continue to generate debate and argues that further reform is required.



The simple five-minute tip that can help your whole day feel better.



Dr Nick Carr

I got this tip from QUT Professor of neuroscience, Selena Bartlett, and I think it's brilliant. To start with she asks, what's the very first thing you look at in the morning? For many of us, it's the phone; a habit which, she says, can make the whole day more anxious and stressful. Why?

Selena explains that there is an intimate connection between our eyes and our brain function. Remember that our eyes actually start as part of our brain in the womb, and migrate forward to sit at the front of the head. Sounds a bit creepy, but eyes and brain are truly connected.

If the first thing we focus on is up close, it triggers a stress response in the brain. This risks being multiplied if we read negative stuff or end up 'doom scrolling', further imprinting that this is going to be a BAD DAY.

If on the other hand, if we start the day by holding our heads still and letting our eyes open to the wide vista, our brains say oh good, this is a safe day. This can be outside, at the bedroom window or even just from the bed. If we accompany these first few minutes with some gentle, positive thoughts, it further teaches the brain that things are OK.

Go back to cave person days. You wake at dawn, go to the cave mouth and look out. If there's something right there, close-up, all teeth and claws, ready to eat you, it really is a bad day. Adrenaline kicks in and you're on high alert.

Narrow focus tends to trigger this protective fight-or-flight response, and here's the thing: because not getting eaten is a crucial survival mechanism, that stress response is hard wired into our brains, and it's way stronger than the it's-all-ok response. So if we start the day with this stress response triggered by narrow

focus, it easily stays with us all day.

But here's another day - you wake at dawn in the cave, look out and see the broad expanse, maybe the odd zebra in the distance, or a duck, or even a capybara (choose your own cave), but no lions nearby (or polar bears or pumas -you get the idea), and it's a good day. It's safe. Your brain will hang on to that safer, less stressful feeling until sundown.

In addition, if you can do this outside, natural light first thing is great for your circadian rhythms. It helps reset the internal body clock, promoting wakefulness during the day and better sleep at night. If you want to get all technical about it, the retina's lightsensitive cells send signals to the brain's suprachiasmatic nucleus, which controls circadian rhythms.

Morning light exposure also helps suppress the production of melatonin, the hormone responsible for sleep, leading to increased alertness and energy levels during the day.

Tip

So, here's the suggestion. On waking, spend your first 5 minutes outside, at a window, or in bed if you have to, looking calmly out at the distance. If you can, combine it with some gentle positive thoughts - I'm alive, so is my goldfish; there's some food in the fridge, it hasn't all gone mouldy yet. Anything simple that helps the brain feel good.

It only takes 5 minutes, and costs nothing.

And I guarantee it really will help for the rest of the day. OK, then you can check your bloody phone.

Where's the evidence?

The Age article of 11 June "Cherryl Barassi's doctor says he should be allowed to raise assisted dying with patients", raised a familiar issue, with our DWDV Board member Dr Nick Carr identified as the doctor concerned.

The article noted "*Melbourne doctors have backed calls to overhaul Victoria's assisted dying laws ...*", but also had a section headed "The doubters".

Doubter number 1

But emergency physician and former Australian Medical Association president Dr Stephen Parnis said he had strong reservations, particularly for patients vulnerable to exploitation by family members. "The stakes are clearly so high that, if we get this wrong, then we have a wrongful death," Parnis said.

"There is so much attention on the practice of assisted dying that it has, I think, undermined and delayed improvement in the provision of palliative care – which should be more available and understood by the wider population. That can help so many more people."



Where's the evidence? (cont)

Two points here:

(a) **Exploitation**

Over the 5 years since implementation, DWDV has provided witnesses nearly 500 times. The position of family members has been much more about sorrow in losing a loved one, rather than pleasure at the thought of any inheritance. There have been no credible claims of coercion.

And we have the watchful eye of the VAD Review Board. To June 2023 there were 1312 applications for VAD that resulted in Medication being dispensed – with no trace of wrongful deaths. As the Medical Board of Australia saw fit to take Dr Carr to VCAT over a trivial admin error, it would surely have gone berserk if there had ever been hint of a wrongful death.

(b) **Detriment to Palliative Care**

This was claimed at the outset, when talking of VAD legislation. We have found no evidence of reduction in funding for Palliative Care in Victoria since 2019. The most recent State budget notes, under "Looking after Victorians in their later years", that "This Budget continues that record, with \$70 million for aged care and palliative services: \$38 million will extend our state's specialist palliative care services."

An article from Third Sector "State and Federal funding back Palliative Care Victoria" notes "Palliative Care Victoria, ... has launched a groundbreaking initiative to change and enhance the quality of care for seniors. The initiative – Dignified and Respectful Decisions – educates Australians about the importance and power of discussing end-of-life plans with their loved ones and how to effectively collaborate with aged care teams to improve living and dying in residential aged care. Dignified and Respectful Decisions is driven and developed by Palliative Care Victoria, and jointly funded by the Commonwealth Department of Health and Ageing, and the Victorian Government Department of Health."



It seems that in most places where VAD laws have come in, palliative care had actually had increased funding.

Doubter number 2

Asked about Barassi's plight on Tuesday, Victorian Opposition Leader John Pesutto said he believed assisted dying laws should stay as they are. "One of the challenges you face is that once you start to undo the safeguards that are in place, where does it end? It can't just be a system that's allowed to unravel".

Pesutto's point follows a well-worn trail, commonly labelled as 'Slippery slope'.

There are various opinions opposing that notion. Two are:

(a) J & S Rachels have written the book "The Elements of Moral Philosophy", which Amazon notes as "Firmly established as the standard text for undergraduate courses in ethics". The authors contend "If you are opposed to something, but can't think of a good reason why, then you can always dream up something terrible that might happen as a result ... and no matter how unrealistic your prediction is, no one can prove you wrong."

(b) The summary in the Canadian case of Carter v Canada from 2012, with Justice Lynn Smith presiding, included "It is unethical to refuse to relieve the suffering of a patient who requests and requires such relief, simply in order to protect other hypothetical patients from hypothetical harm."

In any event, to imply that slippery slopes are inevitable denies the whole basis of a well-run democracy. Legislative change is not made without due process. And if problems arise, they are dealt with.

Opponents to VAD have made it clear that they will never give up. Their determination, and their strength of feeling, can lead to bizarre outcomes. For example, at a public meeting in Mulgrave, in the lead-up to legislation for Victoria, a prominent opponent, referring to those who sought change in the law, claimed "They can't wait to start killing people".

The history of VAD in Australia has been littered with such nonsense. As the arguments provided by opponents are so weak, we may conclude that the real reasons for their objections lie elsewhere.

Resources:

<https://www.budget.vic.gov.au/record-investment-frontline-care>

<https://www.thirdsector.com.au/state-and-federal-funding-back-palliative-care-victoria/>

A VAD Story

"Choosing VAD was an easy decision for myself once I was satisfied with the research I had done. Having an option to die with dignity whenever that may suit me is a gift, a precious gift I am eternally grateful for.

As it has turned out, once my pain and discomfort had begun, dying for me right now has been slow and drawn out and will continue to be this way until a natural death will occur....

...I have chosen my place, time and date to pass. The pressure of putting on a brave face and pretending I'm ok days are over. I have no strength left to hold in my emotions to ease those around me.

I now feel a sense of relief, a weight has lifted off my shoulders."

<https://www.dwdv.org.au/stories/louises-story/>



News from Australia ...

Nationally

The Federal ban on VAD being discussed over a carriage service remains a discriminatory impediment to many individuals trying to access Voluntary Assisted Dying, particularly those living in rural areas. Recently the Federal and State branches of the Australian Medical Association called for the Commonwealth Attorney General to amend the code. The issue of residency requirements in VAD legislation of the Australian states and The ACT seems unnecessary now that all but the NT have VAD laws, making the idea of VAD tourism obsolete.



Australian Capital Territory

On June 5, the ACT became the seventh Australian jurisdiction to pass Voluntary Assisted Dying legislation. This was a momentous and historic occasion magnified by the fact that, up until November 2022, a federal ban had been in place for 25 years, that prevented the issue of VAD being discussed in the ACT parliament. The bill passed the Legislative Assembly (it is a unicameral parliament) with support from all Labor and Green members and several Liberal members, twenty votes to five. An incredible achievement. The bill has been described as the most progressive amongst Australian states. Most notably the eligibility criterium for a time until death prognosis, seen in all other state legislations, have been deleted. Nurses will also play a greater role in the VAD process.



Prior to the successful passage of the VAD legislation in the ACT Legislative Assembly, MP Dr Marisa Paterson announced that she was proposing an amendment to the Bill. This amendment would have allowed a waiver of final consent in cases in which an individual had been deemed eligible for VAD but then lost capacity just before the administration of the VAD substance. This amendment was not carried through but would have been a critical step in addressing the option of VAD for individuals diagnosed with dementia. An election will be held in October and if the Labor/Greens members can form government again, they have committed to exploring the issue of loss of capacity and to deliver a report mid-2025.

New South Wales

The NSW VAD Review Board issued its first report on assisted dying in NSW. It covers the first three months of VAD operation, from November 28, 2023, up until the end of February 2024. In that time 517 people made a first request, 309 underwent two assessments, 246 individuals received the substance authorisation and 131 people died via an assisted death. Of those who made a first request, 57% were male and 43% female, most were between 70 and 79 years of age. There were 10 First Nations people. Interestingly 34% lived in Greater Sydney with the remainder in regional NSW. Most people who applied for VAD had cancer, with neurological disorders coming in second. Of the 131 people who died via VAD 70% chose practitioner administration.



News from Australia (cont)

Northern Territory

Following the successful passage of VAD legislation in the ACT, headlines as such were not surprising. "NT out in cold on 'die laws'."



Queensland

Queensland doctors call on the state government to increase funding to end-of-life care, including VAD. The State budget included \$4.5m for a VAD pharmacy program. Queensland Health has released a report on the first year of VAD operation, January 1 – December 31, 2023. Five hundred and ninety-eight people accessed a VAD death. There were 361 authorised VAD practitioners. The average age of those who sought access was 73 years old and 48% lived in rural/regional areas of Queensland. A state election will be held in October and should the Liberal, National Party be voted into government, it will be interesting to see how they approach Queensland's VAD law, to which they were and remain opposed.



South Australia

The Premier released the first quarterly VAD report which was very positive. The report stated that 28 people were approved for VAD and 11 individuals accessed an assisted death, seven who suffered from terminal cancer. A terminally ill man who was convicted for a 10 year bank robbing spree accessed VAD shortly after he was sentenced. This is certainly a meaty issue for ethicists.



Victoria

There has been a lot of VAD media coverage recently. This was precipitated by a 3-page article in which Cheryl Barassi, the widow of the late AFL great, Ron Barassi, described his suffering at the end of his life and how he was denied the opportunity to access a voluntary assisted death, a cause they both had staunchly supported. Cheryl's health is now fading, and she is suffering and like her husband does not qualify for VAD because of strict eligibility criteria. Consequently, she tragically attempted to take her life last month. Cheryl's indescribable courage in so selflessly speaking out, to draw attention to the critical inadequacies and much needed changes to Victoria's VAD legislation, has already been rewarded by the massive public reaction with an outpouring of emotion.



An article the next day, interviewed Victorian doctors who called for reform of Victorian VAD legislation which would, at the very least, bring Victoria into line with the other states and the ACT. A fantastic Editorial in 'The Age' capped a very successful week off. It called for legislative change to reform Victoria's now lagging VAD legislation. "...Victoria, once viewed as a trailblazer on the important issue of dying with dignity, has now fallen behind other jurisdictions with such laws, with those advocating for the legislation to be updated arguing some of the measures designed as safeguards are unnecessary barriers" ... "A few important amendments will make the world of difference to the sickest among us, including those who feel forced to die by suicide or live longer than they wish due to unnecessary hurdles."

And yet another article appropriately acknowledges and pays tribute to individuals, such as Cheryl Barassi, who bravely come forward and share their intensely private and personal stories.

Western Australia

Members of DWDWA took part in a "focus group" meeting with Professors Ben White and Lindy Willmott of QUT. The meeting was conducted so that reviewers of the recent WA VAD legislative review could obtain feedback from stakeholders.



... and Around the World



Brazil

A young woman, who suffers from a rare neurological disease, has begun an online fund-raising campaign to raise the money to fly to Switzerland to have an assisted death.

Canada

Last year Quebec passed legislation that allowed for individuals with a serious and incurable illness, such as Alzheimer's, to request MAID/VAD whilst they were deemed competent to provide consent. It was intended that the procedure be carried out when the individual's condition worsened, and they were assessed as no longer having decision making capacity.

This piece of legislation received attention from VAD jurisdictions all over the world. Initially it was stated that it would take 2 years for the legislation to come into effect. However it seems a cone of silence has been placed around the issue.

Recently there has been a suggestion that a private member's bill covering this topic will be tabled. Unfortunately, many negative MAID stories still emanate from Canada.

A 27-year-old Calgary woman with autism had been considered eligible for MAID, against her father's wishes. Prior to the date of her scheduled death, she voluntarily ceased food and fluids and her father acknowledged that his protestations were causing her further suffering.

Chile

Whilst delivering a State of the Nation address, Chile's President stated that he plans to accelerate debate on an assisted dying bill.

Finland

A recent poll shows that more than half of Finns support VAD.

France

On May 13, a special commission made up of 71 MPs proposed over 3000 amendments to a previously drafted government Assisted Dying bill. The bill along with all the amendments was then presented to the entire parliamentary assembly on May 27, where a 2-week discussion on the first reading of the bill was scheduled.

It is reported that 90% of the French population are in favour of a bill and there are of course religious opponents with one describing it as "the marker of the end of a society influenced by Christianity".

Some have suggested that the parliamentary debate could last until the summer of 2025. The bill has specifically ruled assisted dying eligibility for individuals with mental illness as their sole underlying disease, and neurodegenerative diseases such as Alzheimer's.

Unfortunately, this heartening progress was proceeded by thoroughly heart-breaking news for French VAD advocates.

There has been a dramatic shift to the right in the European Parliament and this has prompted the announcement of a snap election.

France will now vote in two rounds of national elections on June 30 and July 7. A subsequent report related that the Assisted Dying Legislation debate will now be put on hold.

However, President Macron has announced that he would like to resume debate on Voluntary Assisted legislation following the rounds of elections. It is hoped that all Party leaders will agree.

... and Around the World (cont)

Hungary

A brave Hungarian constitutional lawyer, who has end-stage ALS, and has been campaigning for assisted dying legislation for the last two years.

Assisted dying legislation is not expected to be passed in the Hungarian parliament anytime soon. He filed a case at the European Court of Human Rights in Strasbourg that he hoped would enable him to end his life in a manner and time of his own choosing.

The Hungarian government then lodged a counter-petition asking the court to declare his request inadmissible to which he has responded.

Unfortunately, the Fidesz majority has shown little compassion or interest in his case, and he has been informed by the European Court of Human Rights in Strasbourg does not have the right to an assisted death.

It has been reported that the Hungarian President is considering pardoning those who assist terminally ill people to die.



India

A man who suffered traumatic brain injuries after a four-flight fall has been in a vegetative state since 2013, but the Court has rejected his parents' application for an assisted death, because he can still breathe unaided.

Ireland

Sadly, it is becoming more apparent that the Irish government is not going to deal with assisted dying legislation until after the next general election in March 2025. In the words of the Irish Examiner, "Like other contentious issues, assisted dying is likely to be put into the deep freeze until we have a government with a new mandate."

Korea

A member of the opposition has proposed an assisted dying bill called "Act on Assisted Dying With Dignity". It is intended for people who want to access VAD to apply to an Assisted Dying Review Committee, which will consist mainly of medical professionals.

New Zealand

Stories of Tracy Hickman, a former UK resident, resonated around the world. Tracy, who had terminal cancer with tumours in multiple sites, decided to access an assisted death. She spoke publicly and before her death stated her desire that a planned legislative review would allow people who are not considered eligible for VAD (because they do not fulfill the 6-month prognosis criterium but who experience extreme suffering) to access VAD. She died on a beach surrounded by loved ones.

End-of-Life Choice Society NZ commissioned a survey to gauge public attitudes towards the organization's proposed amendments. The results showed the highest support was for removal of the gag clause, especially high for disabled people. There was very high support for individuals diagnosed with dementia to be able to access VAD and just over half of those surveyed wanted complete removal of the time-to-death clause.

A Review of the legislation will take place in November 2024 and will happen in 2 stages. The first, which is well underway, is examining the operation of the current law; the second will ask the public what changes they would like to see in the law.

The department has set up a consultation process which will commence on August 1 and end on September 26. Individuals and organisations are invited to make submissions. This release says the government does not intend to change the law but seems to encourage initiatives from individual MPs to propose amendments to the current Act.

... and Around the World (cont)

Peru

In April a 47-year-old woman who had lived for 30 years with polymyositis, that rendered her bedridden and dependant on a ventilator, was finally able to die peacefully on her own terms.

This followed a lengthy court battle, fought on her behalf by her lawyer. In 2022, a Peruvian judge ordered the establishment of a euthanasia protocol, which was applicable solely to the woman.

The lawyer at the time asked for this protocol to be applicable to other cases. This was denied.

It must be noted that the Supreme Court did not legalize the assisted death but did not prosecute the doctor who provided the life ending substance. The lawyer is now fighting for a woman, suffering from MND, right to die by ceasing artificial ventilation.



Slovenia

It has been reported that seven out of ten parties in the Slovenian parliament support an assisted dying proposal. A recent report has shown that around 54% of voters endorsed legislating the right to an assisted death for terminally ill individuals.

Switzerland

An old story has made news again with a UK woman contacting the media about the death of her 47-year-old son who accessed an assisted death in Switzerland without her or the family's knowledge. Following the media reports, the Swiss clinic has allegedly apologized to the woman and said it would implement changes in future to make sure families in the future were informed.

An amendment that challenged a guarantee that individuals would be provided with the option of an assisted death in nursing homes and care institutions was rejected by 76.56% of voters. The amendment had been passed by a right-wing majority parliament.

The Sarco, a medically assisted 'suicide' pod, invented by Philip Nitschke, was anticipated to be used in July for the first time. However, one Swiss canton has banned the Sarco machine fearing that is unsafe and that it may violate Switzerland's regulation of assisted dying in which the patient must take the action which ends their life.

The Netherlands

There has been a torrent of media reports about the highly contentious case of a 28-year-old Dutch woman, who is in good physical health but has multiple intractable mental health disorders, and has been approved for euthanasia after a four-year process.

United Kingdom

In late April a parliamentary debate on VAD began in the UK parliament following the tabling of a petition, started by Dame Esther Rantzen, of more than 200,000 signatures. The petition called for the government to allocate time for a full debate on assisted dying and for MPs to be given a conscience vote on the issue.

At the same time the UK government ruled out introducing assisted dying legislation in England and Wales but will allow a free vote if a private member's bill is introduced. This was in response to the House of Commons Health and Social Care Committee's report on assisted dying.

The Royal College of Nursing proposes to vote on a motion to change its stance on VAD from neutral to supportive. Assisted dying campaigners in Britain warn that if the VAD bill in Jersey succeeds there will be a rush of people moving from the UK to Jersey for an assisted death.

The UK General Election took place on July 4. The new Prime Minister, Sir Keir Starmer, had recently stated his support for assisted dying and when asked when he would introduce legislation for VAD, he said he didn't have a definite timeline and it would be a private member's bill with a free vote but he was completely committed to it.

One of Britain's most senior judges, former President of the Supreme Court and current member of the House of Lords has said that an assisted dying bill should not be restricted to individuals who are terminally ill. She regards this as "cruel and inhumane" and that assisted dying should be afforded to all those who are "incurably suffering".

... and Around the World (cont)

Scotland

It has been reported that John Swinney, the new First Minister of Scotland, is now considering supporting the latest VAD bill. This bill tightens some of the more progressive aspects of previous unsuccessful bills in 2010 and 2015 which Swinney voted against. His change of heart was prompted by a woman with incurable breast cancer.

Meanwhile, the former First Minister of Scotland, Nicola Sturgeon, who was previously supportive on the introduction of assisted dying, has now changed her mind. This now means that the current First Minister and Health Minister are both opposed. Views are being sought by the Health, Social Care and Sport Committee on the Assisted Dying for Terminally Ill Adults (Scotland) Bill. This would allow terminally ill adults in Scotland to choose to be given assistance by health professionals to end their lives.



Guernsey

A Guernsey woman strongly backs an assisted dying law for the island, and described her husband's assisted death in Spain, as "beautiful".

Isle of Man

Debate over an assisted dying bill began, in May, in the assembly of the Isle of Man (the House of Keys). The residency stipulation in the bill, that required an individual wanting to access assisted dying to have resided in the country for one year has already been amended to 5 years. Opponents have argued that public funds should not be used for VAD. Debate continued in mid-June. Members of the House of Keys discussed assisted dying laws and asked 18 questions which were up for debate.

The proposed assisted dying bill unfortunately received a setback with an amendment stating that individuals would have to self-administer the assisted dying substance and the physician administered option banned. An extra sitting was scheduled for the House of Keys to allow for further debate on proposed assisted dying laws. This has resulted in further protests by proponents and opposers of the bill. The Chief Minister has called for a referendum was discussed but not agreed to. There will now be a Third Reading of the bill in the coming months and assisted dying could become an end-of-life option as soon as 2027.

Jersey

The Jersey assembly has been looking at an assisted dying law and debating whether assisted dying should be established. Proposals for how assisted dying would work were published in March. Five votes are expected to take place. If the proposals are voted through, it is expected the process for drafting a law could take about 18 months, with a debate then taking place by the end of 2025. If a law is approved, it is expected a further 18-month implementation period will then begin, meaning the earliest for it to come into effect would be summer 2027.

United States

A member of the US Congress quietly introduced a bill that would allow for federal funding for MAID and those accessing it to use Medicare or Medicaid. Amidst debate on a MAID bill in **New York state**, the NY State Council of Churches has endorsed the tabled MAID bill.

In **Colorado** a bill was presented that would halve the waiting time for people to access the assisted dying substance. The bill also proposed that Advanced Nurse Practitioners be allowed to prescribe the substance and would reduce the minimum delay between oral requests to seven days and introduces a waiver of the waiting period for patients who are not likely to survive more than 48 hours. In April, **New Hampshire** survived a vote to have a bill, to introduce MAID, repealed.

California unsuccessfully sought to broaden the MAID eligibility requirements in its legislation by removing the time until death requirement. It also discussed reforms that would have removed residency requirements and provided individuals with dementia the opportunity to request MAID whilst they are still deemed competent.

The **Delaware** Senate has voted on an assisted dying bill. It's the first time the state Senate has held a hearing on the Ron Silverio/Heather Block Delaware End of Life Options Act, named in honour of two advocates of the legislation. The bill is now before the governor and with his signature, Delaware will become the 12th U.S. jurisdiction to authorise this compassionate option.

The **Massachusetts** End of Life Options Act has advanced further than ever, and a new poll reveals further growing public support for Assisted Dying with two-thirds of residents supporting the idea.

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We are deeply appreciative of the amazing work done by all our volunteers, but we also rely on the generosity of donors and other benefactors to help us support the right to individual end-of-life choices through voluntary assisted dying, advocate for improvements to current laws and provide support and education for individuals, organisations and communities.

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