

President's Report

Since our last newsletter, your committee has continued to be busy with detailed planning for our campaign to persuade the Premier and the Parliament to properly consider improvements to our Voluntary Assisted Dying Act. Passed almost 6 years ago, the Act is now in urgent need of reform to bring it up to date with legislation in other states and overseas. Far too many people are being denied their wish to avoid suffering at the end of their lives because key eligibility rules are far too rigid. There must be a better balance between access and safeguards. The current Act puts VAD beyond the reach of many who need it most.

As readers know, last year's purported review was a shameful and misleading whitewash. It failed to even mention important calls for reform made by the Voluntary Assisted Dying Board and others.

We have engaged Anthologie, an advocacy and marketing group, to assist us. At the beginning of September, they conducted a workshop with some DWDWA people and others with key experience and skills. They included a close family member of a person who encountered problems accessing VAD, a retired VAD practitioner and Dr Brian Walker, a member of the state upper house for the Legalise Cannabis party. There is a separate report on the workshop later in the newsletter.

The second part of this exercise is a series of interviews with a range of people with important perspectives. It is underway as I write this report.



We are very much looking forward to the fruits of these processes – namely, materials and messaging that will be invaluable as we move into the final stages of the campaign. Those stages are: raising funds for publicity; forming alliances with other relevant community groups; producing written and visual campaign tools; and embarking on direct contact, media and social media campaigning with the public and parliamentarians.

In addition, we continue with important regular activities, such as a recent meeting with the Voluntary Assisted Dying Board, and a presentation at a community centre in Williams, and on 9 August several committee members attended a Dying to Know Day event in Scarborough. At this event I spoke about our campaign, and about VAD processes. The day was

NOTICE OF ANNUAL GENERAL MEETING OF DWDWA

Date & Time: 2pm 22nd October 2025

Location: Citiplace, Concourse Level, Perth Railway Station

organised by Cara Walker, a young and energetic funeral director with many interesting ideas (see her article in this newsletter for a sample). We were able to provide copies of our new pamphlet to interested people and copies will also be available for you and your friends at our AGM.

On behalf of DWDWA I have made a submission to the Northern Territory review about the need for a VAD law for the Territory. As things stand at the moment, this is the only jurisdiction in the entire country without a voluntary assisted dying law. The irony of this is intense, as Marshall Perron's government in 1995 had introduced the world's first legislation for VAD – only for it to be quashed by the federal parliament shortly afterwards in 1997.

Tony Buti, a Minister in the state government, has recently completed his history of the passage of our Act. His book launch will have happened by the time that you are reading this newsletter. The book is entitled "A Considered Act: How Voluntary Assisted Dying Became Legal in Western Australia". There is a more detailed article about this event later in this newsletter.

Please come along to our Annual General Meeting. It will be held, in the usual place, on Wednesday 22nd October at 2p.m. The guest speaker is Jill Heinrich, who lost her husband to dementia in November 2024 and was unable to access the palliative care system offered by his nursing home. Jill is a strong advocate that VAD should be available for dementia sufferers and that we should be able to make the request using an advance health directive while still having capacity. Jill is an advocate for Dementia Australia and we anticipate a powerful presentation from her about this condition that touches the lives of so many Australians.

Further details about the AGM can be found at the end of the newsletter.

We would love to hear your comments on our campaign: we hope that you are as excited about it as we are.

Steve Walker
President, DWDWA

Dying to Know Day

This year's Dying to Know day fell on a wet and windy Saturday the 9th of August. Notwithstanding, a good crowd was attracted to the expo organised by Cara Walker of Walker Family Funerals in the Scarborough Community Hall.

Cara is a new generation funeral director and a strong supporter of voluntary assisted dying. More about her work can be found in the following article.

A range of speakers spoke about what it means to 'die well' and how to go about it.

DWDWA President Steve Walker told a responsive audience about the eligibility rules and processes in the current VAD legislation, and about our campaign to reopen the issues that continue to obstruct a peaceful death for the terminally ill. As we are finding across Western Australia there was strong interest in our proposals for improvement, particularly in finding a way to make VAD accessible to those with dementia and other neurodegenerative conditions that lead to a loss of capacity.

DWDWA also ran one of the stalls at the venue. Our volunteers distributed our new pamphlet and encouraged membership and donations to help with the campaign.

As we know from the original campaign to pass voluntary assisted dying legislation, this kind of function is very useful for raising community awareness. It can also be an effective way to persuade our politicians that the existing law needs to change to ensure that those who are terminally ill and suffering are able to choose a peaceful death.

Gail Wyatt
Hon secretary, DWDWA



Walker Family Funerals – A Fresh Approach to Saying Goodbye

Walker Family Funerals may be the new kid on the block, but its roots are grounded in compassion, creativity, and integrity. Founded by **Cara Walker**, the business is already reshaping the way Perth families say goodbye.

Cara is no stranger to community work. For more than 30 years, she inspired families to live sustainably through her company *Eco Faeries*. Alongside this, she took on one of the hardest roles imaginable: celebrant for children's funerals. "It's one of those jobs that breaks your heart a million times over," Cara says, "but I can't imagine a more important time to stand with a family."

Her work as a celebrant revealed the struggles many families face. Too often, grief was compounded by financial strain. Many were offered only rigid, standardised services that didn't reflect their loved one.

The Australian funeral industry is worth \$2.2 billion. While you'd expect compassion to be at its core, many families report inflated prices, limited choice, and misleading information. In the fog of grief, few feel able to shop around. Only later do they realise they paid too much for a service that didn't suit them. Cara believed there had to be a better way.

Funerals with heart

Walker Family Funerals was built on a radical idea: funerals should be designed around the person, not a package. Whether a family wants a private cremation, a traditional church service, a Viking send-off, or a garden party with tea and scones, the choice should be theirs.

"There are so many ways to celebrate a life," Cara says, "but families are often told what they can't do because it doesn't fit a schedule."

Time is flexible too. Some services last hours as full-day gatherings; others are intimate moments. Every farewell is shaped around the family's needs.

The road to licensing

Becoming a funeral director wasn't easy. Cara trained with another independent company in Perth before applying for her own licence with the Metropolitan Cemeteries Board. Despite meeting requirements, her application was rejected without clear reasons.

What followed was a 10-month battle, ending in a State Administrative Tribunal hearing. Facing the MCB's lawyers was daunting, but Cara's determination never wavered. She knew she had the experience and the setup to serve families with integrity. As of this financial year, Walker Family Funerals is licensed and open for business.

Opening conversations

Cara is equally committed to breaking down secrecy around funerals. She runs workshops to help people ask the right questions and feel empowered to make decisions.

In August, she launched the first **Dying to Know Expo**, a free community event covering topics from voluntary assisted dying to grief support. Despite stormy weather, the turnout was strong, and hopes are high it will become an annual event. Through this, Cara connected with Dying with Dignity WA. Both share the belief that open discussions about death help people live—and die—more fully.

Sustainable choices

Affordability and sustainability sit at the heart of Walker Family Funerals. Options such as

cardboard coffins, low-impact cremations, and natural burials are available.

Cara is also inspired by *Natural Organic Reduction (NOR)*—human body composting—now legal in Washington State, USA. “I visited NOR facilities in the US,” she says. “They’re done with such tenderness. A body is laid to rest in a vessel, and seven weeks later the family either receives the soil or donates it to forest rehabilitation. It’s gentle, sustainable, and gives something back to the earth.”

With climate change and population growth, Cara believes options like this will soon be necessary in Australia.

Restoring dignity

Much of today’s funeral industry feels like a conveyor belt of services—efficient, but impersonal. Walker Family Funerals is choosing a different path: slowing down, listening, and making space for families to say goodbye their way.

Cara’s vision is simple but powerful: funerals with more heart, more time, and more choice. In doing so, Walker Family Funerals isn’t just offering services. It’s restoring dignity, creativity, and compassion to one of life’s most important moments.

A comparative perspective on VAD in WA and Victoria

I remain an active member of the DWDWA committee but my move to Melbourne a few months ago has given me the opportunity to learn more about the VAD scene in Victoria, particularly in relation to the five-year review of Victoria’s Voluntary Assisted Dying Act 2017.

As readers of this newsletter will know, the recent review of WA’s VAD legislation found that it was “working as intended” and that the VAD Act did not need any amendment. This was a foregone conclusion given the terms of reference of the review that precluded any consideration of the eligibility criteria.

In contrast, the Victorian review was substantive, and made recommendations aimed at improving

the support and sustainability of the VAD system, and the equity of access to this end of life choice.

Victorian review recommendations

The five recommendations made by the panel were accepted by the Victorian government. These include enhancing community awareness of VAD, grief and bereavement supports and growing and supporting the VAD workforce. DWDV believes that the proposed amendments will:

- Remove the “gag clause” so health practitioners can initiate VAD discussions;
- Extend the prognosis requirement to 12 months for all applicants;
- Adjust request timelines; and
- Revise citizenship/residency criteria to broaden eligibility.

Looking at these recommendations from a Western Australian perspective, DWDWA also advocates:

for a less restrictive gag clause, while noting that in WA health professionals are already permitted to raise the issue of VAD with patients in the context of a general discussion about end of life choices;

- for the removal of the time to death prognosis, while noting that 12 months would be better than the current requirement of 6 months
- (except for neurodegenerative conditions where the prognosis criterion is 12 months); and
- for the citizenship and residency requirements to be broadened.

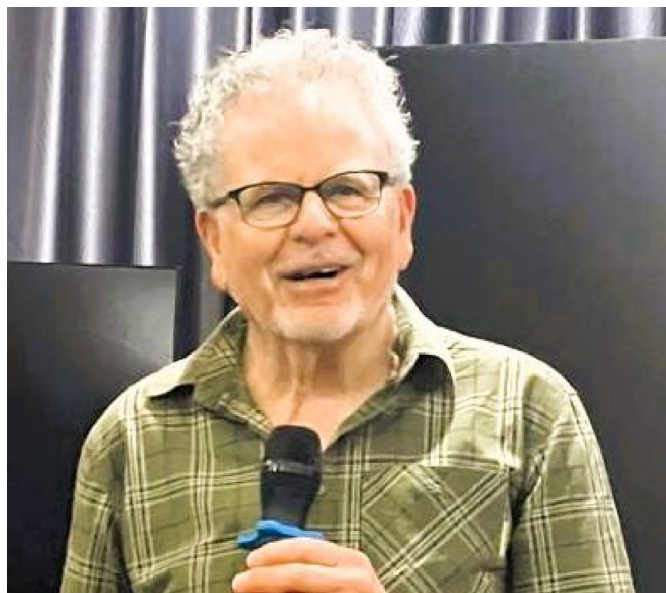
Next steps in Victoria

Dying with Dignity Victoria hosted a very well attended event on 11 September 2025 at the Victorian Parliament entitled “Meet the VAD community and discuss why amendments to the VAD Act 2017 are imperative”.

The Minister for Health hosted the meeting that I attended and it included a panel discussion, personal stories and comments from medical practitioners. More than a dozen

other organisations expressing support for the amendments also participated.

In Victoria, as in Western Australia, the parliament that passed the original VAD legislation is very different to the current parliament, and I believe there is much to be learned from the Victorian experience.



Peter Wilkins

Dying with Dignity's campaign for improvements to WA's Voluntary Assisted Dying Act

In its quest to boost the campaign to reform WA's VAD Act, DWDWA has engaged the services of Anthologie, a design and marketing company, and Lanna Hill, the founder of Leverage Media, who works closely with Anthologie.

There is already much research and anecdotal evidence (including in the three annual reports published to date by the VAD Board) that some changes to the Act are needed to make voluntary assisted dying more equitable in Western Australia. Such changes would bring WA's VAD law into line with progressive changes in other Australian jurisdictions and around the world.

DWDWA is working principally with Josh Edge, the creative director of Anthologie, and with Leverage

to "stress test" the existing evidence to ascertain if there is a strong case for change, and if there is, to help build it. Lanna has been speaking to key stakeholders in the VAD process, including those who seek VAD as their own end of life choice, or have experience of a loved one going through - or failing to go through - that process. Others being canvassed include experts in fundraising, MPs, VAD clinicians, carers, advocacy partners and associated organisations, and members of the VAD 'bureaucracy': the Department of Health, the VAD Board, and the statewide care navigator and pharmacy services.

Importantly Lanna has not only been interviewing supporters of VAD but others who may be opposed to it, in order to identify and overcome potential roadblocks and challenges.

The campaign for change was officially launched in early September by Anthologie and Leverage in a workshop attended by four representatives from DWDWA and six others drawn from the above groups. One purpose of the workshop was to align our thinking on how to motivate government to educate the general public (including the medical fraternity) about VAD. Another was how to use stories, consistent messaging and conventional and social media to raise community awareness and engagement, both of which have fallen to an all-time low since the passage of the original legislation in December 2019.

The ultimate goal is to build the momentum and political will needed to persuade the government to review and change the existing legislation.

The team working with us have broad experience and we are optimistic that their services are going to prove invaluable in helping us achieve progress towards improving access to VAD.

We will keep you informed as the campaign progresses, and as always, we depend on your support. Without your dedication during the 2018/19 campaign, we would not have VAD as an end of life choice today. Now once again we will need you to get involved - to tell your stories, and spread the word - and of course to donate whatever you can afford!

Dinny Laurence/Julie Cinanni

Book Launch

On Monday 8th September The Hon Dr Toni Buti MLA launched his new book entitled *A Considered Act: How Voluntary Assisted Dying Became Legal in Western Australia*.

Popular demand caused the original venue (the UWA Club) to be changed to the much larger Social Sciences lecture hall with a capacity of 350, and on the night every seat was taken. The book was launched by Premier Roger Cook, and there were many familiar faces from the original VAD campaign, including many past and present MPs and others deeply involved in the legislative process.

Dr Buti holds four ministerial portfolios, including that of Attorney General. He has also written eight books, which caused the Premier to quip that "I must have a word to Tony about this later".

Dr Buti has a daughter, Alkira, who has Cri du Chat syndrome. In his speech during the VAD debate, Dr Buti spoke movingly about Alkira, and of his concern that "someone may take advantage of someone like Alkira and other people such as the elderly. The power imbalance between a doctor and patient, particularly one with a terminal illness, could be great. Many people are influenced by what their doctor says. I do not want to deny anyone the opportunity of dying with dignity or to not have a chance of rejecting a bad death, but I want people to self-initiate the discussion..."

Ultimately in the vote in the Assembly Dr Buti supported the Bill with an amendment providing that a medical practitioner or nurse practitioner may initiate a conversation about VAD in the context of a medical consultation in which other treatment options, including palliative care, are discussed with the patient.

The information provided about the event states that "*A Considered Act* provides a thoughtful and thought-provoking narrative-based analysis of the political and legislative passage, ethical and moral arguments, and, crucially, personal stories of individuals and families behind the historic passage of voluntary assisted dying (VAD) legislation in Western Australia in 2019. A highly vexed social and political issue, Dr Buti's book

navigates the complexity of voluntary assisted dying with care, compassion and coherency. The personal stories outlined in the book are moving."

Sadly there was no opportunity to ask questions after the talk. If there had been, I might have asked Dr Buti to provide his take on *why* there is an enduring interest in the progression through Parliament of a law that was passed nearly six years ago, when most of the people at the launch had lived through it themselves? Was it just nostalgia, or something more profound? By December 2019, this was a law whose time, eventually, had come. But perhaps the buzz in the room on 8th September 2025 was not about the past, but about an opportunity for an even more compassionate and equitable law in the future.

Dinny Laurence

Manager of DWDWA's campaign for VAD legislation





YOUR COMMITTEE NEEDS YOU NOW!

CAN YOU HELP?

This year your Committee has been focussed on lobbying for some seriously needed updates to our current Voluntary Assisted Dying (VAD) Act. Some of the improvements we're working for at present include:

- capacity - allowing for an Advance Health Directive (AHD) made in advance to be legal in cases of diminished capability;
- time to death eligibility criterion;
- Telehealth to be permitted for all VAD consultations;
- Expansion of VAD workforce; and
- allowing all health professionals to raise the subject of VAD in the context of discussing other end-of-life options.

We'd like to have twelve members on our Committee, but unfortunately, due to a number of factors, we're now down to nine.

We especially need help for our 'Total Brains Trust' as well as our Database Administrator and our Secretaries. (Are you unafraid of an Excel spreadsheet or learning new skills?) We need people with enthusiasm to share our endeavours.

Please contact Steve Walker 0411 431 091 or president@dwdwa.org.au to discuss how you can help.

Margie Lundy
Committee Member

GUEST SPEAKER – ANNUAL GENERAL MEETING

22nd October 2025 Citiplace 2pm

"The Scourge of Dementia"

Our Guest Speaker at this year's AGM will be Jill Heinrich, a member who joined us last year. She will tell us of the experience of having lost her husband to dementia in November 2024.

Jill will be sharing some valuable insights about her dementia journey and how it might be made less painful for the sufferer and their family.

Stop Press

Dear Member.

If you are interested in joining the Management Committee for the 2025/2026 year please complete the application form which you will find on the following page of this Newsletter. You can bring it to the Annual General Meeting on October the 22nd.

Alternatively you can email it to us prior to the AGM and we will complete the details and put it to the vote.

COMMITTEE MEMBERSHIP

DYING WITH DIGNITY WESTERN AUSTRALIA (INC)

NOMINATION FORM FOR ELECTION TO A VACANT POSITION

POSITION

CANDIDATE: Title First Name Surname
(names in block letters)

Address

.....

Phone Year of birth

PROPOSED BY
(Name in block letters) (Signature) (Date)

SECONDED BY
(Name in block letters) (Signature) (Date)

ACCEPTANCE

I accept nomination to the above position

I offer the following summary of my background relevant to the position :

(Optional)

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Additional Comments (Optional)

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DYING WITH DIGNITY WESTERN AUSTRALIA (INC.)

PO Box 7243, Cloisters Square, Perth 6850

Email: memberships@dwdwa.org.au

MEMBERSHIP RENEWAL FORM

Membership year runs from 1st of July to 30th of June of the following year

Standard Rates

- Single \$20
- Double \$30
- Life Single \$200
- Life Double \$300

Donation \$ _____

Pensioner / Student Rates

- Single \$15
- Double \$25
- Life Single \$150
- Life Double \$250

(Rates unchanged since 1st July 2009)

Cheques payable to **Dying With Dignity WA** to the above address or at any Bendigo Bank branch, or online: Account **Dying With Dignity WA - BSB No: 633-000, Account No: 215 508 771**

If renewing through our website, **please** use the “**Become a Member**” link or your payment is receipted as a donation and cannot subsequently be diverted to your membership subs.

If paying by cheque or cash, please complete this form and forward it to us, or bring it with you to the meeting.

Please print clearly

First name _____ Surname _____

Address _____

Postcode _____ Phone _____ Year of birth: _____

Email _____

ARE YOU A FINANCIAL MEMBER?

If the address label on this newsletter has a **date ending in 25 (or earlier)**, your subscription is no longer current. Life members are noted as such and don't need to pay subs, although donations are always welcome.

If paying by bank deposit, particularly over the counter, please ensure your name is included. For more information or to get an application form for a new member, please contact DWDWA by email to memberships@dwdwa.org.au or see our website

BEQUESTS AND DONATIONS

DWDWA is an independent, non-profit, advocacy organisation and totally reliant on membership fees, donations and bequests for our funding. We are always very grateful for donations and bequests which enable us to further our aims. You may remain anonymous and do not need a new Will if you sign a short codicil.

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Vice-President: Richard Lugg

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Minute Secretary: Mary Aerts

Committee Members: Gaye Harvey,
Margie Lundy, Murray Hindle, Peter
Wilkins

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