

Annual Report 2022



Go Gentle Australia acknowledges Traditional Owners of Country throughout Australia and recognises their continuing connection to lands, waters and communities. We pay our respect to Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander cultures; and to Elders past and present.

We are proud to support the Uluru Statement from the Heart. We accept the invitation to support constitutional and structural reform so Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people can take their rightful place in our nation, including a Voice to the Australian parliament.



Our greatest impact is in storytelling. We are committed to reflecting different cultures, backgrounds and viewpoints to broaden representation, empathy and understanding.



We are an ACNC registered charity with DGR1 status.
All donations over \$2 are tax deductible.

**The power of
choice at the
end of life.**



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A Message from Andrew Denton



Our hard-won voluntary assisted dying (VAD) laws mean little if good people do not step forward to administer them.

In October, I was privileged to give a keynote address to the Queensland VAD Implementation Conference, supporting the introduction of their law on 1 January 2023.

There I chaired a panel with VAD practitioners from Victoria and Western Australia who have already spent years supporting people to access end-of-life choice. What they shared was inspiring and humbling.

Young, compassionate and committed to person-centred care, they showed us the future of end-of-life care in Australia. Listeners were left with a deep sense of confidence and optimism.

And that's no small thing.

Because all of us are going to die. None of us knows how our dying will be; all we know for sure is that our deaths will be ours, and ours alone. We should strive to make this last, most intimate act the best it can be.

It's why NSW passing a VAD law in 2022, becoming the sixth and final state to do so, was so significant. That such a progressive law could happen in arguably our most conservative state demonstrated the enormity of the revolution in end-of-life care that has occurred.

Equally momentous was the federal parliament's lifting, a few months later, of the quarter-century ban on the Australian Capital Territory and Northern Territory from passing their own VAD laws.

These and other achievements are outlined here and I urge you to take a few moments to celebrate them. None would have been possible without your commitment and support.

However, with every revolution comes a reckoning. While we rightly pay tribute to the legislative success, we also understand that VAD laws are only a first step. We now must ensure these hard-won reforms fulfil their promise.

As each state implements its VAD law, stories quickly emerge, not only of peaceful, dignified deaths, but also of eligible people struggling to access the help they need: dying people forced to travel long distances to see a doctor face-to-face, because of a ban on using Telehealth; gravely ill individuals separated from loved ones across state borders because of (now redundant) residency requirements; vulnerable people denied their legal rights by doctors and institutions who wield conscientious objection as a weapon. Go Gentle is determined to ensure these barriers are removed.

For those dedicated health professionals who have stepped forward, we are also determined to do all we can to shine a light on their incredible commitment and lighten their load by encouraging others to join them.

Leading this crucial work is our new chief executive Dr Linda Swan, who was previously Chief Medical Officer at Medibank. Linda has brought with her a wealth of medical knowledge and contacts as well as frontline experience as a former GP. We are delighted to have her onboard.

Of course, Linda's arrival meant we bid farewell to our founding CEO Kiki Paul, who made the decision to stand aside after six outstanding years. Kiki took Go Gentle from a start-up to the trusted national voice we are proud to be today. I couldn't be more grateful to her, and am very pleased that she has joined our Board.

– Andrew Denton

A Message from the CEO



It has been an exciting time to join Go Gentle Australia, not least because 2022 has been a pivotal year; New South Wales became the sixth and final state to pass a voluntary assisted dying (VAD) law in May, and by December the Senate had lifted the limit on the Territories debating their own end-of-life choice laws.

The prospect that all Australians may soon have the option of VAD should they become terminally ill is tantalisingly close. In no small part, this is thanks to a highly motivated community of supporters who have generously donated their time, dollars and expertise to achieve these milestone reforms. I have joined Go Gentle for the next stage, but I want to extend my heartfelt thanks and acknowledge the incredible efforts of those who have been here from the start.

My first months with the team were spent planning and preparing for what's next. It is clear that passing the laws is not the end of the story. We must now embed them, ensure they are accessible to the people they were designed to help and build an infrastructure around VAD to ensure patients and their families are supported.

As a doctor, I have a deep appreciation and understanding of the critical role that healthcare professionals play in supporting VAD patients and their families. I am also committed to ensuring we support and enable their work.

We have a three-pronged, national approach to:

- **Pass, defend and improve** VAD laws
- **Ensure access** to quality VAD support and services
- **Establish** VAD as a normalised end-of-life choice.

To achieve our vision, we will:

- **Amplify** the voices of dying people, their families and carers
- **Empower** people to know their end-of-life options and make informed choices
- **Identify** and document gaps in care for dying Australians
- **Support** health professionals and systems to integrate VAD choice into care provision
- **Advocate** for accessible, person-centred VAD laws in every state and territory.

This has become the basis of a packed business plan which makes me a little dizzy looking at it – but we are dedicated to making it happen.

We have supported VAD implementation processes across all states and will continue to campaign for laws in the ACT and NT. We are collecting testimonies of how the processes are working and how they could be improved and we know there are improvements that are needed urgently.

First, clarification of Commonwealth law to reassure states that Telehealth and email can be used for VAD assessments. It is impractical and discriminatory to require all of the VAD process (including training) to be conducted in-person, especially for those in rural areas or for whom travel is impossible.

Second, VAD needs to be added to the Medicare Benefits Schedule so that doctors can be properly compensated for their time and expertise, and patients' out-of-pocket costs can be minimised. The current system relies on doctors' goodwill and is both unfair and unsustainable.

Of course, there are other issues we'd love to see ironed out. We will always work with patients, families and their healthcare teams to make sure VAD is recognised as a valid end-of-life choice alongside palliative care, hospice care, or indeed no treatment at all.

Thank you to all those who have reached out with warm messages of welcome. We have much to do in the year ahead and I look forward to working with you all.

– Dr Linda Swan

Our vision is an Australia where everyone has choice at the end of life

Who we are

Go Gentle Australia was established in 2016 to promote choice at the end of life. As a national charity, we played a critical role in the introduction of voluntary assisted dying laws (VAD) across Australia.

We empower people to choose the care that is right for them, including the option of voluntary assisted dying.

We believe the voices of dying people should be heard and their decisions respected.

What we do

We work nationally to:

Pass, defend and improve voluntary assisted dying laws

Ensure access to quality voluntary assisted dying support and services

Remove stigma and normalise voluntary assisted dying as an end-of-life choice.

To achieve our vision, we:

Advocate for accessible, person-centred voluntary assisted dying laws in every Australian state and territory

Amplify the voices of dying people, their families and carers

Empower people to know their end-of-life options and make informed choices

Identify and document gaps in care for dying Australians

Support health professionals and systems to integrate voluntary assisted dying choice into care provision.



Suffering intolerably with motor neurone disease, Sue Parker (pictured above) chose a voluntary assisted death in Victoria in 2022. Photo by Julian Kingma.

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We always live our values of choice, respect, compassion and integrity.

Our board

GGA's board members are all volunteers who bring significant experience from their fields of expertise. The Board meets regularly to guide and assist the organisation to achieve its strategic goals.



Peter Thompson

Peter chairs the Go Gentle Board. He has extensive experience in commercial and corporate law, specialising in the entertainment and media industries.



Andrew Denton

Andrew is one of Australian media's genuinely creative forces with a career covering radio, television and film. He is the creator of the podcast series *Better Off Dead*, investigating why good people die bad deaths in Australia.



Tanya Jones

Tanya is a strategic communications professional with over 20 years of experience running large corporate, brand and political advertising campaigns.



Craig Stafford

Craig has worked in the finance industry for some three decades. He is passionate about health, education and sport. Craig is a Founding Partner and Head of Research at Barrenjoey Capital Partners.



Prof Brian Owler AM

Brian is a neurosurgeon who treats both cranial and spinal conditions of adults and children. He chaired the Expert Ministerial Advisory Panel on Voluntary Assisted Dying in Victoria and is a past president of the AMA.



Kiki Paul

After 20 years in financial services, Kiki now uses her business experience in the not-for-profit sector. She is passionate about social justice, equal opportunities and making the world a better place. Kiki joined the board after six outstanding years as GGA's CEO.



Our management team

Dr Linda Swan

CEO

Linda's background is in primary care and population health. A former GP, most recently she was Medibank's Group Chief Medical Officer. She has a reputation for clear thinking, compassionate leadership and organisational transformation. Linda now brings her expertise and enviable network to end-of-life choice.

Steve Offner

COMMUNICATIONS DIRECTOR

Steve joined GGA after more than two decades in journalism and corporate communications and a stint as media adviser for the Australian Marriage Equality Campaign. He coordinates GGA's national communications strategy, media engagement, and GGA's digital and social media platforms.

Frankie Bennett

PR & CAMPAIGNS MANAGER

Frankie joined GGA following the successful End of Life Choice referendum in New Zealand, where she was Assistant Campaign Manager. She has previously worked with Dignity in Dying in the UK and Compassion in Dying, their sister charity. She holds a Law degree from the London School of Economics.

Renae Titchmarsh

DESIGN & PROJECTS

Renae's skills as a graphic designer have made her an invaluable asset to the team. Renae is responsible for ensuring brand recognition and consistency across all GGA assets. She is passionate about accessibility, legibility and functionality when designing.

2022 achievements



67,118 supporters



NSW becomes the **6th state** to legalise voluntary assisted dying (VAD)



15.2 million Australians with access to VAD by 1 January 2023,
with a further **10 million** to gain access by the year's end



Repeal of the federal Euthanasia Laws Act allowing the
Northern Territory and ACT to debate and pass VAD laws



601 individual donors



700+ media stories

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Thank you Go Gentle, your enduring and tangible support underpins great VAD wins in every state.

Therese McLean, GGA supporter, Queensland



The state of VAD legislation in Australia

- States that offer voluntary assisted dying
- States soon to offer voluntary assisted dying
- Territories without voluntary assisted dying

Pass, defend and improve VAD laws

Go Gentle Australia is the only organisation with a national focus on end-of-life choice. The existence of accessible and person-centred voluntary assisted dying laws in every state and territory is fundamental to our vision.

Parliamentary debates

NSW

From January, GGA campaigned strongly to ensure NSW joined every other Australian state to pass a voluntary assisted dying (VAD) law. With the Lower House already in support, we continued our briefings of Upper House MPs and our awareness campaign which featured the images and stories of NSW residents who had suffered and died without access to choice. We led rallies with Dying with Dignity NSW outside parliament house and launched a concerted media campaign that left politicians in no doubt about the extent of public support for this reform.

As the Upper House prepared to debate whether religious aged-care institutions should be allowed to block access to VAD, we released polling showing **75% of NSW voters believed dying people should have access to all legal medical treatments in the privacy of their own homes**, even if this was an aged-care facility.

On 19 May, the Legislative Council voted decisively to pass the bill largely unamended, bringing NSW in line with other

Australian states. Eligible NSW residents can begin making requests to access the law from 28 November 2023.

Territory Rights

In May, the election of the Albanese Labor government made the prospect of Territory Rights more achievable.

Backbenchers Alicia Payne (ACT) and Luke Gosling (NT) introduced a private member's bill to repeal the Euthanasia Laws Act which for 25 years had prevented the territories from debating VAD. To help persuade MPs to back the Bill, GGA launched a public 'contact your MPs' campaign and produced a 'Guide to Restoring Territory Rights' and other briefing documents. After a several weeks of heated debate, the Bill passed the House of Representatives in August and the Senate in December.

With the Territories now free to debate and pass their own VAD laws, the ACT announced it would begin public consultation on a bill in the second half of 2023. The Northern Territory government is still to commit to a timetable for reform.

Powerful testimonies to the NSW Upper House

As the NSW parliamentary debate continued, we redoubled efforts to communicate the stories of needless suffering in the absence of an assisted dying law. Our 'They Died Waiting' campaign, conducted in partnership with Dying with Dignity NSW, was a powerful reminder to Upper House politicians of the need for end-of-life choice.

Among the testimonies were the stories shared by six families at a parliamentary inquiry into the proposed legislation. All had witnessed loved ones needlessly suffer as they died.

The testimonies' impact on MP deliberations cannot be overstated. As videos they were viewed more than 586,000 times on YouTube, representing more than 1.5 million 'watched minutes'. One video, Abbey Egan's story of her partner Jayde, who died horribly of cervical cancer at the age of 32, was viewed more than 485,000 times.



Jayde Britton (left) and Abbey Egan



To watch the video, scan the QR code or visit:
<https://youtu.be/qeXmANWP-e4>



Defending existing laws

With the legislative battle largely won, in June we turned our attention to ensuring that VAD laws already in place are protected from those who would seek to dismantle them.

GGA's founder Andrew Denton reminded Australians that the threat was real. Writing in The Rationalist Society's *Religiosity in Australia* series, Denton said 'Right to Life' opponents of VAD "have been emboldened by the success of fellow travellers in the USA who, after decades of grass roots activism, succeeded in having Roe v Wade overturned, and reproductive rights for many American women set back half a century".

He continued: "The lesson from the US is also the lesson for us: A liberal democracy is always open to being subverted by minority forces who are well resourced, well organised, and determined. Preserving our genuinely secular society – including voluntary assisted dying laws – requires vigilance and engagement."

Andrew's warning was not simply speculative. Local anti-choice organisations have already publicly stated that "the work of dismantling these [VAD] laws, state by state, begins today. We will not stop until we have overturned them all".

Throughout the year, we monitored opponent groups and responded quickly and robustly to the most egregious and misleading public attacks on VAD. In December, we condemned the Catholic Church's edict that terminally ill people who end their lives using VAD would be denied spiritual care.

A spotlight on obstruction

Having failed to prevent the passage of VAD laws, anti-choice opponents adopted a new tactic – obstruction. NSW Labor MLC Greg Donnelly, a devout Catholic, summarised the new

strategy, telling NSW parliament that faith-based groups had an obligation to oppose the VAD law's implementation. Citing St Thomas Aquinas, Donnelly said: "As institutions, you should not cooperate at all with the implementation of the provisions of the legislation."

The Catholic Medical Association heeded the call, with speakers at a public seminar in July urging healthcare professionals to report their colleagues to police if they heard them discussing VAD. They also urged institutions to create by-laws to make it impossible for VAD to happen on their premises.

To counter this new threat, we launched an ongoing project to collect and publish examples of individuals and institutions who unreasonably or unethically obstruct VAD services.

Barriers to access

Provisions exist in all Australian states for a review of VAD operations, with Victoria and WA to be the first to appraise their legislation in 2023. These reviews will provide valuable opportunities to identify and remove barriers to access.

We began a major project to collect testimonies and evidence from Victoria and Western Australia to create a first-hand picture of how the VAD laws are working and what might be improved. What we learn from this project will inform our work for many years to come.

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Focusing on this movement for change and not on my own suffering helped me get through the day. It has not only changed our society, it has changed our humanity. Australia is a greater and more compassionate country for the work you have done.

Beth, GGA supporter, NSW



15k testimonies



6 MP briefing papers



400+ media stories,
10.2m online views,
137k social shares.



586k views on YouTube



8 rallies

New South Wales: The day compassion won

“NSW has finally passed a threshold of honesty and compassion. Honesty that not all people die well and compassion that people with advanced and cruel terminal illnesses will have the same end-of-life care options as those in every other state.”

With these words, Independent MP for Sydney Alex Greenwich ushered in the final vote that saw NSW Parliament join every other Australian state in passing voluntary assisted dying (VAD) legislation.

It was a remarkable moment for Australia but also a significant milestone for Go Gentle Australia. Our campaign to see all Australians have access to compassionate VAD laws had overcome one of the last major hurdles. We were finally seeing terminally ill people in the most populous state win the same end of life rights as other Australians.

Arguably the most conservative state, NSW was the toughest battle yet. Neither the Premier nor the Opposition Leader supported the VAD bill and it was testament to the tenacity of supporters and the skill of its political sponsors that it was the most supported bill in Australia's history, with 29 MPs from across the political spectrum co-signing the legislation.

These MPs, led by Alex Greenwich, who wrote and championed the bill, and his colleagues Independent MP for Lake Macquarie Greg Piper and Labor MLC Adam Searle, displayed an unparalleled commitment and sense of justice.

Numerous people contributed to the success including dozens facing terminal illness who gave up their precious time to

advocate for this law, many of whom are no longer with us: Judith Daley (deceased), Belinda Ryan (deceased), Loredana Mulhall (deceased), Annie Gabrielides (deceased), Lawrie Daniel (deceased), Tim Edwards (deceased), Sara Wright (deceased), and also Siobhan O'Sullivan, Mark Butler, Janet Cohen and Scott Riddle.

We could not have asked for more capable allies in Dying with Dignity NSW, led by the inimitable Penny Hackett and Shayne Higson, whose tireless contribution alongside their Board and membership was tide-turning. They worked assiduously, over many years, to develop relationships with MPs across the parliament. Their ground game of activating people locally was exceptional. Smart, focused, tireless, professional, they deserve every accolade.

Our gratitude, too, goes to the many family members who participated in the [They Died Waiting](#) campaign. Their courage and determination in telling their stories and turning up again and again for rallies outside parliament house changed hearts and minds.

NSW Health is now working through an 18-month implementation period before the law comes into effect on 28 November 2023.

Territory rights restored

In December, the Australian parliament overturned a 25-year ban on territory governments making their own laws on voluntary assisted dying (VAD).

The repeal of the federal Euthanasia Laws Act on the final sitting night of the year meant the Northern Territory (NT) and Australian Capital Territory (ACT) can now make up their own minds on VAD, rather than federal powers deciding for them.

This rights a historic wrong. Back in 1995, the NT bravely passed the world's first compassionate euthanasia law. However, only four people were able to make use of the legislation before it was overturned by the federal parliament, which also banned the Territories from debating the issue again.

The reversal of this undemocratic overreach into Territory affairs was long overdue. With every Australian state having passed a VAD law, it was only right that the NT and ACT were allowed the same choice.

As Judy Dent, wife of Bob Dent, the first person to use the original NT law, put it: "Why must we be treated as second class citizens when it comes to deciding how we die?"

It was obvious to all that the context had changed dramatically since the original law was overturned in 1997. The private member's bill introduced by Labor backbenchers Alicia Payne (ACT) and Luke Gosling (NT) was a simple repeal bill. While some politicians wanted to make the debate about the pros and cons of VAD, it was clear the substantive issue was whether the Territories should have the right to decide for themselves. A majority of MPs from across the political spectrum agreed.

Special thanks goes to Alicia Payne and Luke Gosling, ACT Senator Katy Gallagher for her decade-long championing of the issue and for shepherding the Bill through the Senate, and ACT Senator David Pocock for keeping Territory Rights at the centre of political debate.

Marshall Perron, Chief Minister of the NT when the original law passed, celebrated the Bill's success but noted it was a bittersweet moment. His thoughts were with the more than 1000 people burdened by intolerable suffering who might have chosen to use the NT's law in the intervening years, he said.

Whether or not the Territories pass their own VAD laws is now in the hands of the NT and ACT Legislative Assemblies. The ACT government has begun public consultations and says it expects to introduce a bill in the second half of 2023. The NT has not yet committed to a timetable for reform.



250+ media stories
Estimated 5.4m online views



1.1k emails sent to MPs



ACT Senators David Pocock and Katy Gallagher after the vote on the Territory Rights Bill. AAP Image/Mick Tsikas.

Ensure access to quality voluntary assisted dying support and services

Go Gentle Australia is committed to identifying gaps in end-of-life care and ensuring that dying people know their options and are empowered to make informed choices.

Identifying and documenting gaps in care

With voluntary assisted dying (VAD) laws now in place in all Australian states, we refocused our efforts on identifying deficiencies in the legislation and barriers to access.

To lead this work, in October we welcomed Dr Linda Swan as our new CEO. Linda joined us from Medibank where she had been Group Chief Medical Officer since 2015. She brings with her a wealth of knowledge and contacts across the medical professions, and also frontline experience as a former GP.

Under Linda's leadership, we identified several reform priorities. These included amending the Commonwealth Criminal Code Act 1995 to enable medical practitioners to use Telehealth and email to share VAD information; ensuring patients are not left with hefty out of pocket expenses for VAD services and that doctors are fairly compensated for their VAD work; and, removing restrictive state-based residency requirements.

Sharing evidence

We continued to collect and share data and evidence about the benefits and limitations of VAD laws around the country.

In September, we helped publicise the **Victorian VAD Review Board's** third annual report which confirmed the law continues to operate safely and lawfully, but also that access remains an issue. The Review Board identified the prohibition on using Telehealth as a major barrier for Victorians accessing VAD in rural and regional areas.

We also supported the **Western Australian Review Board's** efforts to publicise its inaugural annual report which noted a greater-than-expected demand for VAD in WA and called for more doctors to take up the VAD training. The Review Board made six recommendations, including removing the ban on Telehealth, more funding for state-wide VAD services, and the adequate remuneration of VAD practitioners.





900+ social media posts



1.4m post impressions



586k views on YouTube

Information and education

Informing and educating the public about VAD as a legal end-of-life option is a central part of our mission.

In the lead up to the commencement of **Tasmania's** VAD law in October, and **Queensland's** on 1 January 2023, we launched targeted email and social media campaigns informing Tasmanians and Queenslanders about the laws and how best to access VAD support services.

Throughout the year, as the NSW Legislative Council and federal parliament prepared to debate VAD, we continued to collect and publish testimonies of the suffering that happens in the absence of end-of-life choice alongside the overwhelmingly positive experiences of VAD in other states.

We also shone a light on the barriers some eligible people are facing to access the help they need.

The GGA website, Facebook, Instagram and Twitter continued to be frontline resources to inform the public of the progress of end-of-life policy around Australia and the world. This included live tweeting the VAD parliamentary debates in NSW and Canberra.

Our founding director Andrew Denton made regular media appearances and joined medical groups to discuss the issue of end-of-life choice. Podcasting continued to be a rich platform for awareness raising. These included: *The Oncology Podcast*, the *Principle of Charity* podcast, the *Investing for Life* podcast, the *Impatient Podcast* and *The Saturday Paper's 7am* podcast.

Grief and bereavement

VAD deaths come with a unique form of grief. In December, we embarked on a partnership with the Australian Centre for Grief and Bereavement to research and produce a series of VAD-specific resources to help terminally ill individuals and their loved ones navigate a VAD death. The resources will be available in 2023.

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I have just watched Navigating VAD. Wow. Just brilliant, something that all advocates should watch. The educators were so clear and explained so much. Thank you.

Robyn Egan, GGA supporter, SA

Dying to Know Day webinar 'Navigating VAD: How to get the help you need'

In August, with voluntary assisted dying (VAD) already a legal option in Victoria and Western Australia, and soon to be so in other states, more than 300 people registered for our Dying to Know Day webinar titled *Navigating VAD: How to get the help you need*.

All states' laws follow the broad 'Australian model' of VAD. The webinar canvassed: Who is eligible? How do you access VAD, and who can help you navigate the system? Three VAD professionals were on hand to answer these questions and more: Susan Jury, head of Victoria's VAD Care Navigator Service, Alice Morison, head of WA's Care Navigator Service, and Dr Gareth Wahl, a VAD doctor from Perth.

Dying To Know Day is an annual event that empowers Australians at all stages of life to live and die well.

This year, it encouraged people to prioritise compassionate conversations and 'get dead set' around the reality of death and dying – because it's going to happen to us all. A priority was to highlight the simple steps people can take around end-of-life planning, which is personal and unique to everyone.



To watch the video, scan the QR code or visit:
www.youtube.com/watch?v=a9urkzcMroo&t=7s

Normalising voluntary assisted dying as a respected end-of-life choice

Voluntary assisted dying is a new option for terminally ill people in Australia. Go Gentle Australia is supporting health professionals and systems to integrate this end-of life choice into standard care provision.

Communicating VAD experiences

With voluntary assisted dying (VAD) laws now passed in all six Australian states, our focus shifted to recounting the overwhelmingly positive experiences of voluntary assisted dying.

Throughout 2022, accounts continued to emerge of the comfort and reassurance VAD brings to terminally ill people in Victoria and Western Australia.

These stories will form the basis of an ongoing project to remove stigma and to counter the misinformation and fear spread by opponents.

We also continued to collect dozens of testimonies from medical practitioners involved in VAD. These are essential to reassure colleagues that VAD can be integrated safely and compassionately into existing end-of-life care.

Engaging the medical professions

We continued to build networks of doctors and other allied health professionals involved in VAD to ensure practitioners are properly trained and have opportunities to speak with peers. This included attending and speaking at events and conferences.

In October, our CEO Linda Swan and founding director Andrew Denton attended the Queensland VAD Implementation Conference. Andrew delivered a well-received keynote address, and led a panel discussion with VAD clinicians. The aim of the conference was to share experiences of VAD in other states and to help Queensland healthcare workers deliver high-quality, safe and compassionate VAD services.

The medical perspective: 'We've seen gentle, beautiful deaths'

Fiona Jane (pictured right) manages an 8-bed community hospice in Western Australia's Great Southern region and says voluntary assisted dying (VAD) is bringing comfort to the people in her care.

She said the hospice community had been incredibly supportive of VAD.

"With voluntary assisted dying in place, we've seen gentle, beautiful deaths where the person was able to plan to the nth degree.

"In our experience of patients requesting voluntary assisted dying, we've seen improved patient-related symptom control of previously difficult to manage symptoms such as fatigue and anxiety. And this has happened almost as soon as the first assessment has been completed.

"The process of assessment acknowledges suffering caused by the burden of the disease process. Our experience has been that the person requesting voluntary assisted dying feels heard and their fear of increased disability, suffering and being a burden on their family is acknowledged."





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**I want my story to be shared,
part of my legacy.**

Sue Parker, Victoria

The Power of Choice

In November, we launched a flagship project to produce a series of photographic portraits and essays to tell the stories of the people who choose voluntary assisted dying (VAD).

Led by award-winning photographer Julian Kingma and inspired by Andrew Denton's podcast *Better Off Dead*, The Power of Choice will celebrate the positive experiences and highlight the challenges of VAD.

By showcasing the courageous individuals who make this choice, their families and carers, the Power of Choice will explore new ways of thinking about what is acceptable and meaningful at the end of life.

Victorian Sue Parker, pictured here with her daughter Nicole, was one of the first to be photographed for the project. Suffering intolerably with motor neurone disease, Sue chose an assisted death in November 2022.

"I have always believed in voluntary assisted dying. My body, my decision. I embrace what I have decided. I want my story to be shared, part of my legacy, to help those who come after me," Sue said.

Operations

Our staff, resources and funds all work towards achieving our vision and objectives – an Australia where we all have choice at the end of life.

Our team

In October, we welcomed Dr Linda Swan as our new CEO. Linda succeeded Kiki Paul who had led us for six outstanding years and who now moves to our Board.

New strategy

With voluntary assisted dying (VAD) legislation in all six states and territory rights restored, GGA is entering a new phase. Led by our new CEO, we engaged in a major strategic review to define our objectives and plot our course over the next three years.

Website

In the second half of the year, we embarked on a major revamp of our website to streamline access to information and resources and more effectively showcase who we are and what we do. The redesign also focused on ensuring the website is accessible to all users.

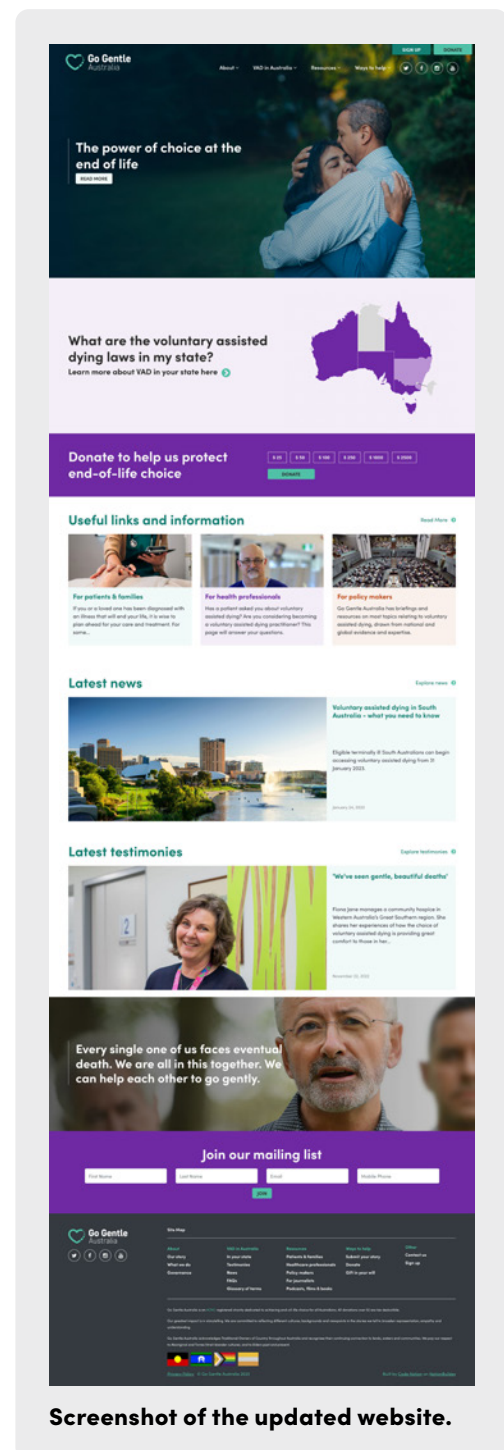
Fundraising and philanthropy

Throughout 2022, we continued our relationships with key donors who shared our vision of end-of-life choice for all. We were delighted to secure further contributions that will help us secure our long-term future.

In May, we rolled out our end-of-financial-year fundraising campaign focusing on the significance of 2022 in Australia's history – the year that VAD laws passed in every state.

We sincerely thanked our supporters whose generosity enabled us to create the evidence-based resources, initiate conversations with MPs and engage in vital public advocacy. Above all, we thanked them for allowing the voices of dying people to be heard.

We were thrilled to raise more than \$55K in the campaign and more than \$117k in public donations over the year, with special gratitude to our regular givers, whose contributions provide us with funding certainty.



Screenshot of the updated website.

Financial Report

For the year ended 30 June 2022

Consolidated Statement of Surplus or Deficit

	2022	2021
Assets		
Current Assets		
Cash and cash equivalents	551,836	593,318
Trade and other receivables	25,987	12,309
Total Current Assets	577,823	605,627
Total Assets	577,823	605,627
Liabilities		
Current Liabilities		
Trade and other payables	26,979	15,732
Total Current Liabilities	26,979	15,732
Equity		
Current year earnings	(39,051)	321,008
Retained surplus	589,895	268,887
Total equity	550,884	589,995

Consolidated Statement of Financial Position

	2022	2021
Revenue	695,326	874,002
Administration expense	(79,040)	(51,297)
Program delivery costs	(596,198)	(441,774)
Employee benefits expenses	(59,715)	(59,923)
Current year surplus before income tax	(39,051)	321,008
Net current year surplus	(39,051)	321,008
Other comprehensive income	–	–
Total comprehensive income for the year	(39,051)	321,008

Remembrance

The roll call of people who have made voluntary assisted dying possible across Australia is long and filled with names worthy of note. But a special place is reserved for those who campaigned as they were dying. In 2022, we lost three of these giants whose tireless work was instrumental in the passing of legislation.

Nia Sims

Politics is not just about who has power. It's about who turns up. Voluntary assisted dying (VAD) campaigner Nia Sims always turned up. And she helped change our world for the better. Nia died in July when she chose to access Victoria's VAD law.

When Nia first started working alongside the team at Go Gentle in 2017, during the prolonged and pitched battle to legalise VAD in Victoria, it was clear she was chronically ill.

Since her early twenties, she had lived with the rare, progressive, autoimmune disease scleroderma, which creates scarring of the body's connective tissues – skin, tendons, ligaments; all the stringy bits that hold us and our organs together. Over time the condition caused untold suffering – limited movement, severely deformed hands and toes, reduced capacity to breathe. "Ultimately, I am likely to die of slow lung failure, starvation or slow heart failure," she told ABC News in 2019.

However, it was not her own suffering that brought Nia to the VAD cause, but that of her father, Greg, who she had witnessed die of brain cancer. Although a trained nurse, Nia never forgot the sense of helplessness she felt watching Greg's last days in the hospital, writhing in pain, drowning in lung secretions, despite being given 'terminal sedation'.

Nia turned that nightmare into a written testimonial, which then became the short film *Stop the Horror* directed by acclaimed Australian film-maker, Justin Kurzell.

The film, a shocking and accurate re-creation of Greg's last days, was so difficult to watch that viewers could press an 'escape' button which would take them to our website with information about how they could contribute to changing the law in Victoria.

And, of course, that was the point: Viewers could escape Greg's suffering at any time. Greg, and too many others like him, could not.

Despite her own obvious suffering, Nia sat through every one of the hundred-plus hours of Victoria's VAD debate. MPs said afterwards that, as fatigue began to overwhelm them, the sight of Nia, and others who were terminally ill, unmoving in the gallery was a powerful reminder of why they were there, and who they were there for.

Warm, kind hearted, generous. Nia never complained about her illness, about the body that just wasn't in step with what her mind wanted. Her illness may have confined her, but it never defined her. Her commitment to the VAD campaign was second to none: she never stopped advocating. Nia Sims turned up. And she helped change our world for the better.

A final promise: Meet me in the middle of the air

In this raw and powerful ABC RN podcast, Nia Sims tells of her unbearable pain and suffering caused by terminal scleroderma, and explains why she has chosen a voluntary assisted death.



To watch the video, scan the QR code or visit:
www.abc.net.au/radionational/programs/earshot





Tanya Battel and John Ancliffe (front row) meet with MPs and other VAD advocates outside Queensland's Parliament House.

Tanya Battel

Tanya Battel once, rightly, dubbed a 'superstar VAD advocate', ended her life, on her own terms, in Switzerland, in August. Like so many who come to this fight, Tanya was drawn in by bitter experience. Long before her own cancer was diagnosed, she saw the same disease take both her parents apart.

She was 11 when she learnt that her mum had breast cancer. How quickly she had to grow up. Before she died, after years of appalling suffering, her mum confessed to her that she would end her life sooner than experience her cancer journey again.

Only a decade later, her father was diagnosed with non-Hodgkin's lymphoma. Despite all treatment, the disease took its brutal course.

Two years later, Tanya, by then the mother of two young children, discovered that she, too, had breast cancer. Despite double mastectomies, in 2016, two decades after it first appeared, it was discovered that the cancer had spread from her breast to her lung. Tanya was given months to live. It is hardly surprising that, out of this furnace of suffering, such a formidable VAD campaigner was forged.

Tanya was fearless in her commitment to speaking truth to power. Her VALE Facebook page, and her Gang of Four, were no-nonsense and brutally honest when describing the effects of terminal cancer, the fears of impending death, and the frustration with a medical orthodoxy who wouldn't – or couldn't – hear the voices of people living with terminal illness.

She was a doer and understood that VAD laws don't pass themselves. Her letter writing, meetings, appearances at parliamentary inquiries, forums, rallies, and in the media, as well as her petition to parliament with over 110,000 signatures, had a significant impact on the campaign to make VAD law in Queensland.

Her appearance, with the late John Ancliffe, at parliament house at the commencement of the debate, was felt to the very core by those who witnessed it. Little wonder that she was thanked by many MPs in their speeches.

Tanya spoke with the deepest authority, not just about the need for VAD, but about what it was to be terminally ill. In 2020, she

took part in Go Gentle's Dying to Know Day webinar, entitled [Living A Full Life While Planning for Death](#). It's worth re-visiting.

It says everything about Tanya that her final journey was with close friends and surrounded by love.

Before her death, Tanya said this to us: "I feel so privileged and blessed to have been able to work with GGA, to have the opportunity to meet up with you and to have continued on with a wonderful friendship with lots of black humour."

Tanya Battel. Was ever a woman so aptly named? Battle ready. Battle hardened. We feel the privilege was ours.

John Ancliffe

Queensland advocate John Ancliffe died in June of motor neurone disease. His courage and determination to advocate for VAD, including through telling his story multiple times to Queensland media, and MPs, changed hearts and minds and was central to legislation passing in that state.

John made his most powerful contributions just a month before the Queensland parliament voted on the VAD bill. The 74-year-old appeared in a video urging MPs to remember what was at stake as the final vote approached. Worried the debate would get bogged down in politics or philosophical issues of religious freedoms he declared VAD to be above religion and politics. "It's about people," he said.

His plea to MPs was difficult to dismiss. "This most awful disease has robbed me of the twilight of my life. So be it. But for the State to then sentence me to suffer until nature ends my life by restricting my breathing to the point of suffocation, I find that ridiculous, criminal and reprehensible."

Although Queensland's VAD law came too late for John, its commencement on 1 January 2023 brings enormous comfort to many dying people and their loved ones.

“

Any legislation will be too late for me, but for future sufferers, this can be my legacy.

John Ancliffe, Queensland

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And to the 253 donors who asked to remain anonymous, thank you.

Go Gentle would like to give a special thanks to:

Ann & Mark Fesq	ETU Queensland	Lois Bryson Fund	QCU	United Workers Union
Berg Family Foundation	Ian Darling AO	Page, Harrison & Co	QODF	Will Vicars
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Go Gentle Australia was established in 2016 and played a critical role in the introduction of voluntary assisted dying laws across Australia. Our charity works nationally to promote choice at the end of life. We empower people to choose the care that is right for them, including the option of voluntary assisted dying. We believe the voices of dying people should be heard and their decisions respected.

Published February 2023.

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