



VADSA Position Statement: Religious Opposition and Voluntary Assisted Dying

Voluntary Assisted Dying South Australia (VADSA) recognises and respects the diversity of moral, cultural and religious beliefs held by people in our community. We acknowledge that some people in some religious traditions oppose voluntary assisted dying (VAD) on theological or moral grounds; others in the same religious tradition support VAD on theological or moral grounds. The right to hold and practise those beliefs is fundamental. In a pluralistic and secular society, the religious beliefs of some people must not be used to deny others access to lawful healthcare choices at the end of life.

All laws are determined by Parliaments and voted into law by Members of Parliament (MP). VAD is considered “a conscience issue” and MPs are not bound by a political party position when they vote. Before voting, each MP is asked to consider the evidence, consult their community, and then decide how they will vote. Religious institutions are free to lobby MPs for particular outcomes on any matter before the Parliament, as are any other individuals or organisations. No religious institution or their representatives determine which laws are passed – or not passed - by a Parliament. It is the MPs themselves who decide how they will vote, after considering the evidence and consulting their community.

Voluntary assisted dying is a compassionate, carefully regulated choice for a small group of people who are dying, have capacity to make the decision, and are experiencing intolerable suffering that cannot be adequately relieved. It is entirely voluntary and initiated by the person. There are many safeguards incorporated into the legislation to ensure that the VAD request and assessment process is voluntary and that no health practitioner is required to participate against their conscience. The South Australian VAD framework explicitly protects freedom of belief and conscientious objection.

Religious opposition often rests on the belief that life is sacred and that only a higher power may determine the timing of death. While this belief is sincerely held by many, it is not shared by all South Australians. In a democratic society, laws governing healthcare must be based on shared civic principles such as autonomy, dignity, compassion, and the prevention of harm—not on any single religious doctrine. To prohibit VAD on religious grounds would impose one moral worldview on people who do not hold that same worldview, limiting their ability to make deeply personal decisions about their own bodies and suffering.

For many people at the end of life, continued existence can involve profound loss of dignity, autonomy, and quality of life. While palliative care is essential and should always be strengthened, it does not relieve all suffering for all patients. Voluntary assisted dying complements palliative care by offering an option of last resort when suffering becomes unbearable. Good quality end of life care provides both palliative care and the choice of VAD.

Concerns that VAD devalues life, particularly the lives of older people, people with disability, or those who are vulnerable, are not supported by evidence. VAD laws in South Australia include rigorous safeguards, multiple assessments, and strict eligibility criteria focused on the individual’s experience of suffering—not their age, disability, or perceived lifestyle. Respecting choice affirms the value of life by recognising each person’s right to determine what dignity and compassion mean for them.

VADSA supports a society where people are free to live—and die—according to their own values, beliefs, and conscience. Respect for religious belief must coexist with respect for individual autonomy. Voluntary assisted dying achieves this balance by allowing choice without coercion and compassion without imposition.

For these reasons, VADSA supports the lawful availability of voluntary assisted dying in South Australia, alongside strong safeguards, high quality palliative care, and full respect for freedom of belief and conscience.