

**Parliamentary and Constitutional Affairs Committee of the Northern Territory  
Inquiry into Voluntary Assisted Dying (VAD)**

13 August 2025

Dear Committee

Thank you for the opportunity to submit. I am the holder of dual Australian and New Zealand citizenship, now permanently residing in New Zealand. The past 25 years of my life have been largely dedicated to the furtherance of VAD law both in Western Australia where I lived until 2009 and since then in New Zealand.

**Key issue 1.**

I very strongly support making VAD legal in the Northern Territory for reasons of compassion. End-stage suffering from incurable, progressive disease is a factor of human life and cannot be entirely eliminated even with the best of palliative care.

Legalising VAD will also help prevent desperate people from having to resort to taking their own life, often by violent and uncertain means, alone, in fear and in agony. I remember evidence being brought to the WA Committee of Inquiry showing that almost 10% of all suicides were undertaken by people tortured by end-stage disease for which no palliation was available or sufficient.

**Key issue 2.**

I urge the Northern Territory to follow the excellent example of the Australian Capital Territory. Above all, there should be no specified time-to-death requirement. New Zealand has been practicing VAD (known here as "assisted dying") since November 2021. Our Act was passed in 2019. We made the error of specifying a prognosis of death requirement of "within 6 months". There is no clinical reason for this. It just "sounded safe" to Parliamentarians and the public. But, as doctors will confirm, it is difficult to predict time-to-death accurately even with special training, and in some cases it is impossible to predict it at all until such time as the person is "actively dying" – i.e. about 2 weeks before death. Cancer is the most predictable disease. But most neuro-degenerative diseases are entirely unpredictable (Parkinson's, multiple sclerosis, Huntington's, Ehlers Danlos Syndrome, COPD, end-stage heart disease to name just a few). Yet people sometimes suffer severely from these diseases. To bar them from a peaceful death when they can no longer bear their suffering is unconscionable. Particularly unconscionable is to bar them from a peaceful death because their doctor cannot do the impossible, i.e. meet an arbitrarily-imposed time-to-death prognosis requirement.

You are undoubtedly aware some other jurisdictions do not impose a time-to-death predictability requirement: Switzerland, Canada, the Netherlands, Belgium, Luxembourg, Canada and Spain. Data and evidence from these jurisdictions show that VAD is safely, consistently practiced there. The more liberal eligibility criteria do not promote undue overuse, do not disadvantage disabled people and do not lead to abuse or coercion.

We here in New Zealand are now trying to undo our foolish decision to include a 6-month time-to-death prognosis requirement as part of our eligibility criteria. An Amendment bill is to be entered into the ballot before the end of August 2025 sponsored by MP Todd Stephenson. I urge the NT Committee to "do it once and do it right". Please learn from our mistake.

**Key issue 3.**

I am not competent to make detailed comment here, except to say that there are many excellent examples around the world to draw on. The West Australian example would be particularly pertinent in terms of remoteness and accommodation of First Nations Peoples.

**Key issue 4.**

As above for 3.

Thank you again for the opportunity to comment. I wish the Committee well in its deliberations.

Yours sincerely



Ann David

