

Via email: LA.VAD@nt.gov.au

Re: Individual submission

7th of August 2025

Greetings Legal and Constitutional Affairs Committee,

Thank you for the opportunity to provide a submission for the inquiry into Voluntary Assisted Dying. I make this submission as an individual and as a member of The Salvation Army.

Do you support making VAD legal in the NT?

I oppose any introduction of Voluntary Assisted Dying (VAD) legislation in the Northern Territory. I do so as a Christian, and also as a person who works alongside Aboriginal peoples in Alice Springs. I also oppose this bill as a former chaplain in a hospital setting, and as a person who has had to give consent to the decision to turn off ventilator life support for my own child, on advice from her treating doctors that life without it could not be sustained. She received good palliative care and died at home in April 2014.

In terms of my Christian faith, I believe that God alone has the power and authority to give and take life. I believe that Jesus gave up his life to redeem our lives and therefore our lives belong to God and not ourselves. I accept that this belief is not shared widely in the Australian community in general and therefore is not the representative view in any electorate.

In terms of my work alongside Aboriginal peoples in Alice Springs, I am extremely concerned about the language barriers that exist in Central Australia and the potential for pressure from family members to influence an individual's position. The level of suicide is also disturbingly high in the Northern Territory and I am concerned that it is impossible to guard the safety of VAD boxes in overcrowded housing in both remote communities and urban locations.

As a former hospital chaplain, I am concerned that people who are very ill and in pain are living very much in the present moment. It can be very difficult for them to even imagine there could be any hope or meaning in the future. However, I remember speaking with a woman who said the final days she had with her husband were the most meaningful of their marriage. They were able to speak of things he had been unwilling to speak of earlier in life- such as the death of their infant son. I think that when we provide an easy option for a premature death, we rob people of the opportunities for deeper emotional and spiritual healing with both their loved ones, and with God.

As a parent who has lost a child through the withdrawal of heroic means to preserve life, I speak as an advocate for good palliative care. My daughter received good palliative care both in hospital and when we took her home. It was a good death. I believe that with appropriate physical, emotional and spiritual support, all people can live out their days with dignity.

Human dignity is not about giving people control over their lives, including the timing of their own death. Human dignity is about honouring every life, no matter what our perception- or even their perception- of their quality of life may be. We are all made in the image of God and have something to offer the world, to the very end. Even in her final days, my daughter who could not move or speak, taught valuable things to both me and others.

I will be praying that the Committee decides against providing drafting instructions to the Attorney-General.

Thank you again for the opportunity to make a submission.

Yours faithfully,

Major Claire Watson