

**From:** [K & S Stephens](#)  
**To:** [LA VAD](#)  
**Subject:** VAD NT  
**Date:** Tuesday, 29 July 2025 10:40:03 AM

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**To:** [LA.VAD@nt.gov.au](mailto:LA.VAD@nt.gov.au)  
**Subject:** Submission – Support for Voluntary Assisted Dying in the Northern Territory

Dear Committee,

CHOICE

INDIVIDUAL CHOICE

INDIVIDUAL END OF LIFE CHOICE

CHOICE

My name is S [REDACTED] Stephens. I am 52 years of age and write from [REDACTED], to express my full support for the introduction and legalisation of Voluntary Assisted Dying (VAD) in the Northern Territory.

In my teens and twenties, I witnessed my own grandparents struggle through prolonged, undignified suffering from cancer. More recently, in my late 40s, I watched my father-in-law endure the aftermath of cancer and chemotherapy, treatments that left his bones crumbling and crushing his nerves daily. He was living with a cancer that one might not necessarily die from, but which still inflicted horrific pain. For the last 12 months of his life, he cried out in agony, with even hospital-administered pain relief failing to help, only distorting his mental state. Eventually, he suffered a massive heart attack at home and fell. It was traumatic and heartbreaking for everyone who loved him.

These experiences reinforced for me the urgent need to give people the right to make decisions about their own end-of-life care—before suffering becomes unmanageable or strips them of dignity and peace.

I believe every individual should have the fundamental right to make informed, compassionate decisions about the end of their life, particularly when faced with the unbearable suffering of a terminal illness. This decision does not belong to governments or institutions; it is deeply personal and must be grounded in dignity, autonomy, and relief from suffering.

The Northern Territory has a responsibility to ensure that VAD is implemented safely, equitably, and accessibly, not just in Darwin and Alice Springs, but across all regions and remote communities. This must be achieved through meaningful consultation with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples, ensuring cultural, spiritual, and linguistic needs are fully respected and supported.

I believe eligibility for VAD should be based on the following criteria:

- A diagnosed terminal illness, confirmed by appropriate medical professionals.
- Full decision-making capacity at the time of the request.
- A voluntary decision, made without coercion or pressure.

Importantly, access to VAD should not be limited solely to people with late-stage cancer. Conditions such as Motor Neurone Disease (MND), early-onset Alzheimer's, and other progressive, degenerative illnesses must also be included, provided the person can make an informed and voluntary decision.

Aged care and memory support facilities are overwhelmed with residents suffering from conditions like dementia. If diagnosed early, I would want the option to choose the time of my death, rather than force my family to endure a slow and distressing decline that robs me of my identity, dignity, and ability to communicate. I would not want to suffer in silence from chronic infections, cancer pain, or fractures from falls when my body no longer knows how to respond. I would not want to sit in soiled diapers and not know how to feed myself, eat, walk, talk, respond, interact. CHOICE

My mother, for example, is in renal failure and currently attends dialysis in Queensland three times a week. Though she is getting sicker and has experienced falls, she retains some autonomy, and with that, the option to decide when to stop treatment. NT residents deserve the same rights.

Why shouldn't we have a say in our own death? Whether someone chooses to have a living funeral or be supported by a death doula or nurse, it is not the government's role to dictate the terms of that journey. Denying access to VAD forces many terminally ill people to take matters into their own hands, through starvation, suicide, or other desperate means, causing additional trauma for families and emergency responders. There must be a more compassionate path.

It is unjust that NT residents are forced to relocate interstate, often six months or more before their final months, to access VAD. This places enormous emotional and financial strain on individuals and families at a time when they should be supported, not burdened.

Comprehensive support must also be provided to all patients to help them understand their options, including access to high-quality palliative care. The NT cannot rely on the outdated idea that older Territorians will simply retire "down south" for care. That was the case 25 to 30 years ago. Today, there is a critical shortage of aged care and palliative services in the NT, and our hospitals are overwhelmed, often with elderly patients needing end-of-life support. These individuals deserve access to every option, including VAD.

Furthermore, arbitrary eligibility criteria, such as requiring a person to be within 6 or 12 months of death, are unnecessarily restrictive. If a person is suffering from a terminal illness with no hope of recovery, they should have the right to decide when their suffering becomes intolerable. Waiting for the so-called "final stages" only prolongs suffering and denies them control over their final moments.

To ensure VAD is delivered safely and ethically, the NT must implement a robust monitoring and oversight framework. Healthcare professionals should be well-trained, the public must be clearly informed about the process, and ongoing support should be provided to patients and families throughout.

Finally, and it goes without saying, but is often raised in public discussions, euthanasia is widely accepted as a kind and necessary act when our beloved pets are terminally ill or suffering. We allow animals a peaceful, dignified death. Yet we deny that same compassion to humans. This inconsistency is troubling and indefensible.

This is a deeply personal issue. The Northern Territory now has an opportunity to lead with compassion and justice. I urge you to proceed without delay to introduce and legislate VAD laws that reflect our shared humanity, uphold the rights of Territorians, and give each person the power to choose a dignified end.

Thank you for considering my views. I respectfully request that this submission be included as part of the public consultation process.

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Warm regards,  
S [REDACTED] Stephens