

MEDIA RELEASE

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WA Euthanasia Bill provides informed choice, not “killing without consent”

All State and Territory Dying With Dignity and Voluntary Euthanasia societies today called on Western Australian parliamentarians to get behind Robin Chapple’s Voluntary Euthanasia Bill, introduced in the WA Parliament this week.

“The Bill provides for someone suffering intolerably and without relief from a terminal illness the right to seek and obtain their doctor’s help to die peacefully if that is their wish,” said Neil Francis, President of Dying With Dignity Victoria. “The Bill contains a comprehensive suite of safeguards, ensuring that only those who make an informed, rational and enduring request have access to assistance to die,” he said.

However, WA Australian Christian Lobby’s Director Michelle Pearse said that “supposed safeguards for euthanasia legislation don’t work. A thousand people a year in Holland [where physician assisted dying is legal] are killed without their consent, showing that so-called voluntary euthanasia quickly becomes non-voluntary euthanasia.”

But, says Francis, “It’s time that those ideologically opposed to reform stopped masquerading gratuitous opinion as fact.” Careful, published scientific studies have repeatedly shown that the stringent processes of lawful assistance means that the vulnerable, are in fact not. “Studies show clearly that the elderly, the lesser educated, the poor, the chronically ill, the physically disabled, the uninsured, and other supposedly disadvantaged groups are not at any heightened risk from such legislation,” Francis said.

Other studies reveal that while non-voluntary euthanasia in Holland is 0.7% of all deaths, in Australia it is an astonishing 3.5%: five times higher. “Here,” said Francis, “non-voluntary euthanasia is currently done with a nudge and a wink, with no formal scrutiny or standardised ethical framework. The unambiguous evidence from overseas is that having a physician assisted dying law also significantly improves the standards of practice around non-voluntary euthanasia in very difficult cases.”

Since Holland’s physician assisted dying law came into effect in 2002, there has been no increase in the practice of non-voluntary euthanasia there, studies reveal.

Newspoll surveys confirm that 85% of Australians believe physician assisted dying should be lawful, including three out of four Catholics, four out of five Anglicans, and nine out of ten with no religion.

“Most Christians believe their God is compassionate,” said Ian Wood, co-founder of Christians Supporting Choice for Voluntary Euthanasia. “Most believe that He would not want them to suffer needlessly at the end of life. The overwhelming majority of Christians want Chapple’s Bill to be passed,” he said.

Chapple’s Bill is slated for debate in the WA Parliament over the coming months.

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