

Dying with Dignity

New South Wales



NEWS | Autumn 2019



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DYING WITH DIGNITY NSW

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Dying with Dignity 
New South Wales

Membership Renewal

It's membership renewal time again. We have included a membership renewal form with this newsletter or you can renew online at: <https://dwdnsw.nationbuilder.com/membership>

If you are not yet a member, please consider joining as we rely on our membership fees to fund our work.

www.dwdnsw.org.au

Dying With Dignity NSW

Notice of 2019 Annual General Meeting

Saturday 27 April 2019
From 1pm – 3.30pm

Sydney Mechanics School of Arts,
Level 1 280 Pitt Street, Sydney
(Accessible access)

Located on the eastern side of Pitt Street
between Park and Bathurst Streets

Guest Speaker

Dr Jill Gordon

PLEASE RSVP

via phone (02) 9212 4782

or email dwd@dwdnsw.org.au

President's Message

This is the most important year in the history of Dying with Dignity NSW. In 2019 we have our best chance of achieving our core purpose - a law to allow voluntary assisted dying (VAD) in New South Wales. There is a state election on Saturday 23 March and we expect another Voluntary Assisted Dying Bill to go before Parliament this year. We must do everything we can to make this happen and we need your help.

DWDNSW have determined that engaging in the political process is the best way to make our MPs understand the overwhelming public support for VAD in NSW. All the recent surveys show support at well over 80% across the country. However, many MPs continue to ignore this and instead exercise their "conscience" votes in a manner that is clearly influenced by the right to life and religious opponents who are increasingly well funded and organised, but represent only a small proportion of the community.

For this reason, DWDNSW is formally supporting the Voluntary Euthanasia Party (VEP) at the election on 23 March. VEP are running in the Upper House and we urge you to give them your first vote. You can then give your 2nd, 3rd and other preferences to the party of your choice. Please see page 3 for more information about the election and VEP's campaign. We have also included a detailed explanation of the NSW voting system on page 5 to help you understand how optional preferential voting works, so you can ensure that your vote will count.

In other news, we were overjoyed with the success of our Forum on End of Life Choices with Andrew Denton and an excellent panel. We sold out 500 tickets and got some great publicity. The event was filmed and is available on our website. See page 6 for details.



Our membership renewals are due on 1 April and we would be very grateful if you could continue to support us with your membership fees. We rely entirely on these fees, along with donations and bequests, to fund our campaigns. See page 16.

We are holding our Annual General meeting on Saturday 27 April 2019 from 1.00 - 3.30pm at the Sydney Mechanics School of Arts, Level 1, 280 Pitt Street, Sydney. Our speaker is Dr Jill Gordon who was one of the panel members at the recent forum with Andrew Denton. We would be delighted if you could join us for the meeting and afternoon tea. See page 2.

Momentum for VAD continues to build across the country and around the world with a number of jurisdictions actively considering VAD laws. We expect legislation in Western Australia this year and perhaps another Bill in Tasmania. When the Victorian VAD regime comes into effect on 19 June this year, one in four Australians will have access to legalised voluntary assisted dying. A remarkable achievement.

The winds of change are having an effect on the medical profession too, with more medical associations reconsidering their formal positions on VAD. We were delighted to learn that the Royal Australasian College of Physicians has officially changed its position from “opposed” to one of “critical neutrality”. See page 7.

There are also signs that Palliative Care Australia are reconsidering their policy. They have recently released two reports on the international experience and evidence on VAD that have concluded that legalising VAD has not been detrimental to the palliative care sector and may, in fact, be beneficial to it. It is not possible to overstate the importance of this conclusion as one of the main arguments raised by opponents of VAD is that it will cause irreparable harm to the delivery of palliative care.

Unsurprisingly, older Australians are very focussed on the issue of death and dying and show high levels of support for VAD. The Council on the Ageing (COTA), which is the peak body for older Australians, has just released the results of a very large survey of Australians over 50 that found 84% support for VAD. This demographic contains

more than 6 million voters and our politicians would do well to take notice of the overwhelming desire in the community for safe and effective assisted dying laws. See page 7.

Finally, we are delighted to include two poems from DWD member and published poet and artist Millicent Jones, which beautifully capture the range of emotions involved with death and dying. Page 12.



As always, thank you for your support,

Penny Hackett
President, DWD NSW



DID YOU KNOW: You can cast your vote in advance of the election at a Prepoll station or by applying for a postal vote. We have included a postal vote application form with this newsletter.

NSW STATE ELECTION SATURDAY 23 MARCH

Make your vote count

The upcoming election on Saturday 23 March could be the critical turning point in our campaign to legalise voluntary assisted dying (VAD). The MPs in this next parliament will be voting on another VAD Bill this year. The future is in our hands at this election and we know that 85% of the community want VAD laws in NSW.

Dying with Dignity NSW believes the best way to send a message to parliament is by giving your first vote to the Voluntary Euthanasia Party in the Upper House. Although DWD is an independent organisation, the Voluntary Euthanasia Party exists for the single purpose of achieving the aims of DWDNSW. However, some other parties and candidates do support VAD and a list will be provided on our website so you can choose how to allocate your vote.

We are sick of MPs ignoring the wishes of the electorate on this issue. At a time when public confidence in our political process is at an all time low, we must rattle the cage and make VAD an election issue.

In late 2017, the last VAD Bill was defeated in the NSW upper house by a single vote. Just a few more supportive MPs will make the difference to the success of the next VAD Bill.

Whoever you choose to vote for, make sure you know their view on VAD. And don't forget that in NSW elections, you determine where your preferences go.

Position of political parties and candidates?

DWDNSW are asking every political party running at the election for their position on voluntary assisted dying laws. We want your help to identify which sitting MPs and candidates will support the next VAD Bill and which ones will oppose.

When candidates are announced in your electorate, please try to contact them and ask for

their position on voluntary assisted dying. Many will try to avoid the question and refuse to commit to a position. We are no longer willing to accept 'undecided' as a response. Unless they will commit to support VAD laws, we will assume they are opposed. Tell them their position will affect how you cast your vote.

We will try to report as many responses as possible on our website dwdnsw.org.au to help NSW voters make informed decisions on Election Day.

Voluntary Euthanasia Party hopes to achieve an upper house seat

Our Vice President Shayne Higson is the lead candidate for the Voluntary Euthanasia Party (VEP) in the NSW upper house. Shayne has a long association with the VEP having run in four previous elections, at a state and federal level, since the party was formed in 2013.

Dying with Dignity NSW supports Shayne's campaign and believes that voting for the VEP is the best way to achieve voluntary assisted dying legislation in NSW. To make your vote count, give your number 1 vote to the Voluntary Euthanasia Party, above the line, on the upper house ballot before choosing your OWN second, third and any further preferences.

Out of the major parties, only the Greens have a policy to support assisted dying legislation. Liberal, National and Labor MPs will be given a conscience vote on the next assisted dying bill. The best way to send a message to the major parties, is to vote VEP number 1. After that, every voter should choose their own second preference.

For further information or to donate, or volunteer contact Shayne Higson on 0403 625 456.

Authorised by Penny Hackett for Dying with Dignity NSW, 330 Wattle St, Ultimo, NSW.

Understanding the NSW Voting System

The way that candidates are elected to parliaments can be confusing because there are different systems in various states and also at the federal level. We have included this section to help you understand the voting system that will be used for the NSW State Election on 23 March 2019 so you can make your vote count.

Optional Preferential Voting – how it works

New South Wales state elections use an “optional preferential” voting system. This means that after voting for the party that is your first choice, you may vote for more choices, but it is not compulsory. You control where your preferences go. It is your decision.

The Lower House

The lower house in NSW is called the Legislative Assembly and is made up of 93 members, each representing their state electorate for a four year term. Under the “optional preferential” voting system on the lower house ballot paper (the small green one) you must put “1” in the box beside your preferred candidate, but you may stop numbering any time after that. You do not need to number all the boxes. So you can vote “1” only, or you can vote “1” and “2” before stopping, or you can vote “1”, “2”, “3” etc, for as many listed candidates as you wish.

The Upper House

The upper house in NSW is called the Legislative Council and it has 42 members who each represent the whole state for an eight year term, with half the members elected at each state election. The candidates are grouped into columns under their party name, with ungrouped independent candidates usually listed in the last column. The ballot paper has a thick black line separating a row with one box for a whole group above the line, from separate boxes for each individual candidate below the line.

In the upper house, you must choose to vote either “above the line” or “below the line”. You cannot do both.

If you vote “**above the line**”, you must put a “1” in the group voting box above your first choice column. This is all you need to do, and it indicates that you vote for all the candidates in that column, in the order in which they are presented. You may vote for as many more columns as you choose, by putting “2”, “3”, etc into the group voting box for your second and third choice party or group. You can stop numbering when you want.

If you vote “**below the line**”, you can vote for individual candidates in any order, from any position and from a variety of parties but you must vote for a **minimum of 15 candidates** by putting the numbers “1” to “15” in the boxes beside your first 15 choices. You may vote for more if you wish and can stop numbering at any point after “15”.

How are your votes and preferences allocated?

In the **Lower House**, there is only one seat available in each electorate. The candidate with the lowest number of first preference votes is eliminated first and their votes are redistributed to the second preferences. If there are no second preferences on a ballot paper that vote is “exhausted” and no longer counts. The ballot papers are recounted and the next lowest candidate is removed. This process is repeated until the successful candidate remains.

A candidate can receive the highest number of first preference votes but not necessarily win the seat as the distribution of preferences may result in another candidate receiving a higher overall vote.

In the **Upper House**, with 21 seats available every four years, it is even more complicated. A “quota” is calculated by taking the number of formal votes and dividing it by the number of seats available. A quota in the 2015 state election was a little under 200,000 votes. This meant that the Liberals with 1.8 million votes had nine quotas (getting nine upper house seats), while Labor with 1.34 million votes had 6.8 quotas, giving them six seats outright. The remaining 0.8 of a quota was applied towards their 7th seat (which they won after 2nd preferences were distributed).

After those who win outright seats are determined, the remaining candidates are looked at to see what percentage of a quota they have

achieved. The lowest candidate is excluded and their preferences redistributed to those remaining. This continues until another candidate has reached a quota. This process is repeated for all the remaining seats and often the last seats are achieved without reaching a full quota. In 2015 the last four seats were achieved without a full quota and the Animal Justice Party was able to win the last remaining upper house seat with first preference votes totalling only 39% of a quota.

How To Make Your Vote Count

A true democracy has many independent members representing the people of their area, but in Australia, your local house member is more likely to belong to a major political party and will usually vote in line with party policies. In the case of laws on voluntary assisted dying, most of the major parties usually allow a “conscience vote” – so that the MP can vote as *their* conscience dictates. Unfortunately, we know that many MPs do not consider the views of their electorate when they vote and are often influenced by their religion or factional or political pressure rather than the wishes of the community and the evidence.

Candidates from the major parties usually win most of the seats in the lower house, and a majority of seats in the upper house. If you give your first vote to a major party, it is unlikely that your second preference will come into play.

If you want to change the status quo and send a message to our MPs, you should consider **voting for minor parties** before the majors. Please don't think that your vote will be wasted. It helps send a message that you are not happy and it also helps your favourite party to climb towards the 4% of first preferences required for funding. If enough people think like you, the minor party candidate may even be elected.

If you want your vote to eventually end up with one of the major parties, then include them as your second or third preference. As the minor parties are knocked out, your vote will flow on to your next preference.

Remember, you have complete control of your preferences.

OTHER NEWS

End of Life Forum

On Sunday 11 November 2018, 500 people gathered at North Sydney Leagues Club to hear Andrew Denton in conversation with a panel of eminent health professionals as they discussed the reality of end of life care in Australia and the choices we face when we die.

This important forum was co-hosted by Dying with Dignity NSW, Voluntary Euthanasia Party NSW, Go Gentle Australia, Doctors for Assisted Dying Choice and Christians Supporting Choice for Voluntary Assisted Dying. The panellists included Dr Rodney Syme, Dr David Leaf, Dr Jill Gordon, Nurse Coral Levett and Jan and Jessica Edwards.

The audience were particularly moved by the DWD video that opened the forum about Tim Edwards who suffered a ‘bad death’ from mesothelioma in early 2018.

Dying with Dignity NSW arranged for the event to be live streamed on Facebook so hundreds of other DWD supporters who could not attend the forum didn't miss out. You can view the full two hour forum including the Q&A section by visiting our website - <https://dwdnsw.org.au/the-truth-about-end-of-life-choices-forum/>



(L to R) Dr David Leaf, Nurse Coral Levett, Dr Jill Gordon, Andrew Denton, Dr Rodney Syme, Jan Edwards and Jessica Edwards.

RACP changes position on voluntary assisted dying

The Royal Australasian College of Physicians updated its position statement on VAD in November 2019 after careful consideration of the issues. It is clear that there are strongly divergent views within the College (which includes the speciality of Palliative Care). The previous position was “opposed” to VAD but they have now adopted a position which has been described as “critical neutrality”.

“The RACP respects and supports all its members and does not believe it is appropriate or possible to enforce a single view on a matter where individual conscience is important. The RACP

recognises that legalisation of voluntary assisted dying is for governments to decide, having regard to the will of the community, to research, and to the views of medical and health practitioners”.

It is explicitly stated that the new stance should not be taken as support for legislative change but they have set out some agreed positions on certain matters in the event that VAD is legalised, including the continued importance of palliative care, protections for the vulnerable and provision for conscientious objectors.

We are very pleased to see this change in position and would urge the Australian Medical Association to reconsider its stance on voluntary assisted dying laws.

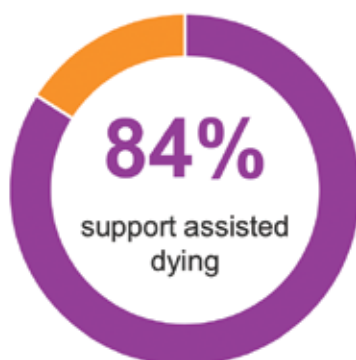
Council on the Aging – Landmark Report COTA Survey

The State of the (Older) Nation 2018 Report, released last December by the Council on the Ageing (COTA) is the most comprehensive national study ever undertaken to seek the views of Australians aged 50 and over. A huge range of issues were covered, including attitudes to assisted dying. We were not surprised to learn that 84% were supportive of voluntary assisted dying as this is consistent with all recent polls taken across the country. This has led the COTA state chief executives to issue a joint call to governments to take action on VAD laws to reflect the overwhelming support in the community. The full report can be found here: <http://www.stateoftheoldernation.org.au/>

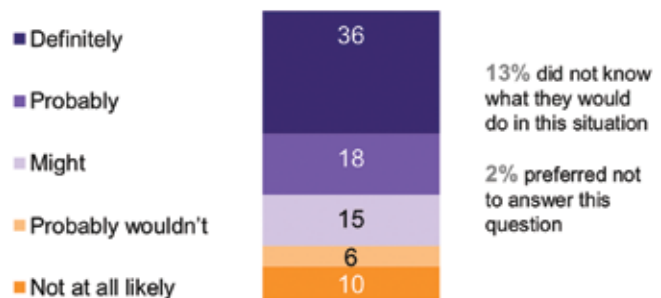


ATTITUDES TOWARDS ASSISTED DYING

Overwhelming support is evident for assisted dying, with the majority open to investigating it for themselves if they had a terminal illness or incurable condition



Would you look into assisted dying as an option (%)



The vast majority of survey participants (84%) indicated that they support the introduction of assisted dying in their state or territory, provided the right protections and legislation were in place, while just 16% were opposed. Support was highest among those with no religion (95%), and significantly lower among Catholics (74%) and Baptists (53%). Those aged 80+ were the most likely to oppose this (25%), compared with 18% of those aged 60-79 and just 12% of those aged 50-59.

NEWS FROM AROUND THE COUNTRY

On track in Western Australia

Western Australia is one step closer to becoming the second Australian state to legalise voluntary assisted dying (VAD).

On 12 November 2018, the Western Australian Government announced that it will introduce a Bill into State Parliament later this year to legalise voluntary assisted dying.

The decision came after the Joint Select Committee on End of Life Choices recommended the new law in its August report *'My Life, My Choice'*, arguing that protracted death from a terminal, chronic or neurological condition can have a devastating effect on patients and their families. It also reasoned that for people with grievous and irremediable suffering, where death is a foreseeable outcome of the condition, voluntary assisted dying should be an option.

Recognising that assisted dying legislation will be a complex and challenging task for the McGowan Government, the Bill will be drafted in consultation with an 11 member panel comprising of leading health professionals, health consumers and legal experts.

Similar to the process followed in Victoria, the Expert Panel, led by former Governor of Western Australia, Malcolm McCusker QC, and former Governor of Western Australia, will provide advice to government on a safe and compassionate framework for voluntary assisted dying in Western Australia.

Dying with Dignity WA welcomed the State Government's announcement.

"We wholeheartedly commend the appointment of Malcolm McCusker QC as the Chair of the Expert Panel and we fully endorse the appointed panel members who are held in high esteem by the health and legal professions," said Steve Walker, President of Dying with Dignity WA.



"We especially acknowledge the appointment of Noreen Fynn whose personal story and drive for compassion is truly admirable.

"We look forward to a comprehensive and respectable debate and extend our hand to anyone in State Parliament who would like to talk about this significant issue.

"Many of us have been campaigning for legislative change since the 1980s and we believe protecting people's right to freedom of choice has been a long time coming," Mr Walker said.

On Saturday 17 November 2018, *The West Australian* released the results of a poll conducted exclusively for *The Weekend West*. The poll revealed that 86 per cent of people want assisted dying made legal in WA, so if WA politicians oppose the voluntary assisted dying bill when it is introduced this year, they will be out of touch with community views.

The result was even higher for those aged between 50 and 59, with 90 per cent saying they were in favour of the legislation.

According to the report in *The Weekend West*, the legislation is expected to pass the Lower House without much resistance, however, in the upper house the numbers are tighter.

Victorian law safe

In the last newsletter, we reported that there were concerns that a Coalition victory in the Victorian State Election in November could have resulted in the Voluntary Assisted Dying Act 2017 being repealed, or being impeded by making the governing regulations practically unworkable. Fortunately, Labor's decisive win means the Victorian law is safe.

In early January the Victorian government confirmed that all of the guidelines were now in place for voluntary assisted dying to begin in June. This means that from 19 June one in four Australians will have access to this compassionate end of life choice, if they meet the strict eligibility criteria. This includes that they have a terminal illness with less than six months to live, are over 18 years of age and have decisional capacity, and they must raise the issue with a doctor themselves. For those dying of neurodegenerative diseases, such as MND or MS, the timeframe is extended to twelve months or less to live.

The Acting Minister for Health, Martin Foley also announced as part of his statement that the pharmacy service at The Alfred Hospital will be the sole pharmacy responsible for importing, storing, preparing and dispensing all voluntary assisted dying medications across the state.

"Having a single point of access for voluntary assisted dying is just one of the ways we're making sure the model is the safest and most conservative in the world," said Mr Foley.

Slow progress in Queensland

Following the Premier's announcement last September that Queensland will hold its own Inquiry into Aged Care, End of Life Choices and Palliative Care, supporters of voluntary assisted dying are still waiting on the release of detailed terms of reference from the Parliamentary Committee and the deadline for submissions to be made.

Dying with Dignity Queensland is encouraging its members and supporters to make submissions so hopefully the Committee will receive hundreds of personal stories supporting the need for assisted dying legislation when the Inquiry begins.

"Almost all of us have a story about a family member or friend who died badly. Whether it was the last few hours, days, weeks or months of their lives that they would not have wanted to endure had they had a choice. They can't write their story, we need you to write their story for them," said DWDQ President, Jos Hall.

The Committee is due to have its final report ready to present to Parliament by 30 November 2019.

Good news from Tasmania

According to a recent media report, Tasmania could also enact a voluntary assisted dying law by the end of 2019, with all sides now open to reform. Apparently the Liberal Premier Will Hodgman has indicated a shift in his position and there are now discussions across the state's three main political parties to co-sponsor a private member's bill.

Mr Hodgman voted against the last assisted dying bill that was defeated in May 2017, but he is now willing to consider supporting a new bill as long as it contains sufficient safeguards to protect the vulnerable.

Dying with Dignity Tasmania continues to work with MPs and is hopeful that with cross-party support, they too may soon see an assisted dying law pass in their state.



"We hope to reach a consensus from across the political spectrum in the Parliament and key community groups about what best meets the needs and wishes of Tasmanians and prevents perceived risks," said DWD Tasmania's President, Margaret Sing.

WHAT'S HAPPENING OVERSEAS

New Zealand

New Zealanders are moving closer to the legalisation of voluntary assisted dying with the Justice Select Committee due to report on 27 March after completing the largest-ever parliamentary tour in November 2018. Parliament will then make its decision nearly four years after the High Court rejected a bid by terminally ill New Zealander, Lecretia Seales, to gain approval for medical assistance to die and passed the responsibility onto legislators.

More than 35,000 submissions were made on David Seymour's End of Life Choice Bill, and approximately 1,800 of them were heard in person. The Bill already included strict criteria; however, in December David Seymour proposed some critical amendments to retain the support of key MPs. He has suggested that the eligibility criteria be amended to limit access to medical assistance in dying to those with terminal illnesses to secure the support of the eight Green Party MPs for the Bill. The second suggested amendment for a referendum was included at the instigation of the nine NZ First MPs. The proposed referendum would take place in 2020 but it is not seen as an obstacle, with every reputable poll in recent years showing between 63–76 per cent of New Zealanders in support of law reform.

Although many advocates would be disappointed with the tightening of the eligibility criteria, most accept that it will ensure the Bill will pass and acknowledge that politics is the art of the possible.



United Kingdom

Possible change in position from major medical body

The Royal College of Physicians (RCP) in the United Kingdom is currently polling its 35,000 members and fellows on whether the law on assisted dying should be changed. A number of other medical associations around the world have formally changed their position on assisted dying from “opposed” to “neutral” and we hope this trend will continue.

Five years ago, a similar survey found that most respondents didn't support a change in the law but there was no majority on what the RCP's position should be. Some 44.4% thought the College should be opposed, but nearly a third (31%) thought it should be neutral, while nearly a quarter (24.6%) said the RCP should support an assisted dying law.

The RCP has confirmed that it will now adopt a neutral position unless two-thirds of respondents either back or oppose a change in the law. The official results of the polling will be released in March.

While opponents are up in arms about the poll, others believe that there is good reason to revisit the topic, including the RCP President who said, “The Royal College of Physicians is frequently asked for its stance on this high profile issue, which may be cited in legal cases and parliamentary debate, so it is essential that we base this on an up-to-date understanding of our members' and fellows' views.”

A lot has happened in the international campaign to legalise assisted dying over the past five years with laws passed in Germany, Colombia, Canada and Australia and more US jurisdictions including California, Colorado, Hawaii and Washington DC. The landscape is changing and we are pleased to see the RCP responding these developments.

Last legal options exhausted for Noel Conway

The campaign for assisted dying in the UK has been supporting the long-running legal battle by MND sufferer, Noel Conway which has been closely watched by advocates around the world. Unfortunately the former lecturer from Shrewsbury lost his appeal in the UK Supreme Court in November 2018, which means his case cannot proceed any further.

Mr Conway, who was too ill to attend the hearing in London, said it was “barbaric” that he must choose between “unacceptable options” to end his life. “The only option I currently have is to remove my ventilator and effectively suffocate to death under sedation,” he said. “To me this is not acceptable.”

Dignity in Dying, which has supported Mr Conway over many years, said it will now turn its attention back to parliament to keep up the pressure for legislative reform.



Spain

Spain could be the next European country to decriminalise voluntary assisted dying with the Spanish government expecting to pass a new law before its terms ends in 2020.

The most recent national opinion poll, taken in 2017, showed 84 percent support for voluntary assisted dying. Most parties other than the main conservative opposition People’s Party have said they will back the minority Socialist government’s decriminalisation bill.

Not surprisingly, the Catholic Church is opposed to the decriminalisation bill. However, their influence is decreasing and Spain has already demonstrated its ‘liberal credentials’ when it

became the third country in the world to legalise same-sex marriage back in 2005.

Scotland

Supporters of voluntary assisted dying will launch a new campaign in Scotland this year focused on the experience of people with terminal conditions in an effort to persuade politicians to bring another VAD bill before the Scottish Parliament, despite being rejected twice in recent years.

Dignity in Dying Scotland organised an event in December bringing medical leaders from Canada to discuss how the medical assistance in dying (MAID) system has worked there since being introduced two years ago and how dissent in the profession was overcome. It was pleasing to see MPs from across the political spectrum attended the event.

Polling suggests that the majority of Scots support law reform but groups such as churches, disability groups and particularly the medical profession have thwarted attempts to pass legislation in the past and can be expected to continue their staunch opposition.

United States

Hawaii’s assisted dying law has now come into effect and there are currently bills progressing in New Jersey, New York, New Mexico, Maine, Maryland and Massachusetts.

A recent report from advocacy group Compassion and Choices has highlighted the growing acceptance of medical aid in dying in the United States and the fact that politicians have little to fear from the issue.

“For decades, lawmakers feared that sponsoring medical aid-in-dying bills that would allow terminally ill adults to have the option to peacefully end their suffering would harm their chances of getting re-elected but last year’s elections proved those concerns false. Nearly all of the lead sponsors of bills in 28 states to authorize medical aid in dying in 2017 and 2018 who ran for re-election won (13 out of 14 state senators and 49 out of 53 state representatives). Voters also elected or re-elected at least five governors who publicly supported medical aid in dying.”

Poetry by Millicent Jones

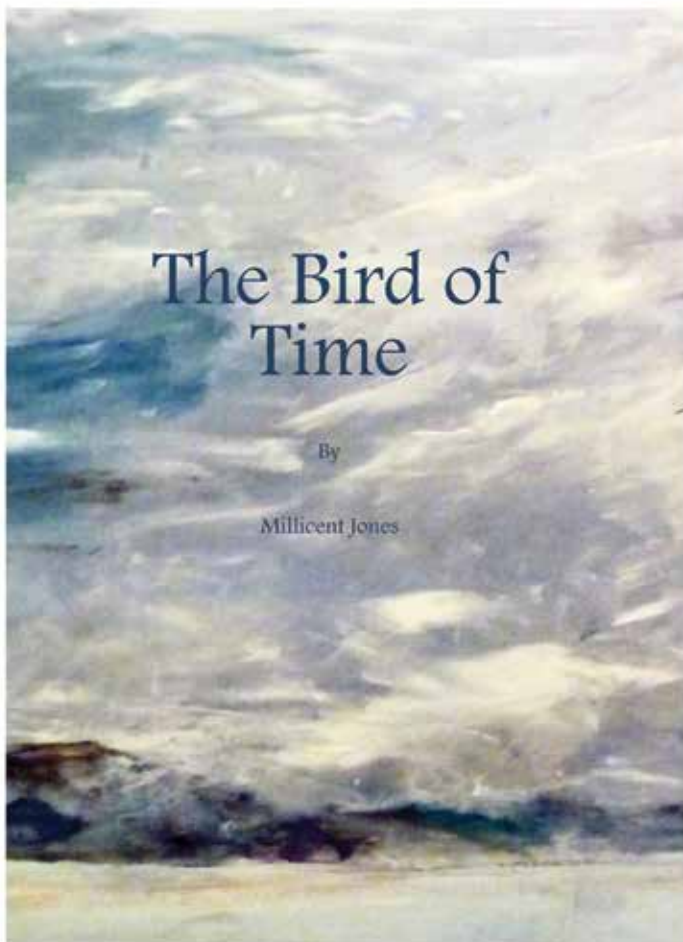
Millicent Jones is a poet, an artist and a strong supporter of Dying with Dignity.

“This has been a subject close to my heart for many years as I have too often watched friends and relatives pass away slowly and painfully. My great wish is that soon we will have the right to choose for ourselves – to die gracefully and with dignity.”

Millicent has dedicated her most recent collection of illustrated poems titled, *The Bird of Time*, to Dying with Dignity and ‘to all those who support our hope of dying in comfort and peace, at a time and place of your choosing.’

“These beautiful poems capture the range of emotions involved with death and dying - sadness, joy, relief, fear and sometimes, anger. “It’s not the fear of dying It’s the fear of living”. This is at the core of what drives people to seek a dignified death.

Penny Hackett, President of DWDNSW



The Bird of Time by Millicent Jones

A not to be missed anthology of poetry, photographs and artwork spanning a lifetime of adventures and experiences, times of joy and times of sadness, but an intimate look at life as it comes to most of us.

Dedicated to Dying with Dignity NSW
(the author is donating \$2 from each book sold to DWDNSW)

There are many poems included that capture the issues and emotions of ageing but they give us the comfort of knowing we are not alone.

Fear Of Living

He must exist without hope – he’s
not maimed by war,
not starving in wretched slums
not homeless
not even paralysed by the relentless cold
of sleeping under bridges -
but cemented in a hospital chair: stuck by his
inability to move.

Frozen body, numb fingers, dead feet - useless
blocks of wood -
and constant pain. Pain in the brain, in the heart
In the belly.
He cannot bear her caress. Cannot suffer her kiss.
Cries out at her touch.
As she wipes his tears - and her own.
Her tears that
soak the lonely night time pillow
pummelled by
black hour memories that jumble the
beginnings and endings
with the fortune they shared in those blooming
younger days
and the rest of time walking together through the
cherished years of ageing.

She sticks their photos on the sterile wall
in his prison cell -
tenderly - smiling she points - remember this ... and
the day we ... and the time you ...
and when the children ... and that Christmas with ..
but he is unable.
Just unable. How can he rejoice? It is gone.
She moves to soothe
to re arrange his favourite cushion from home
the one he
always used behind his back.
And he shudders.
It’s not the fear of dying he challenges.
It’s the fear of living.
Living with his loss and with
her grief -
her absolute devotion. And living with
the picture of them
arm in arm, that she has placed beside his bed.

Happy Birthday Sweet Sister

And she lay –
she lay foetus like
statue of the
unborn a
red blanket
her womb

or her tomb: waiting
to embrace this lifeless
figure who breathed
death blindly
deafly defying
touch but who

once was loving daughter
sweet sister devoted mother
auntie and beloved nan
now non existent
hour after day after
week after year.

But he leant whispering
lips brushed her soft ear
Happy Birthday Sweet
Sister and for
an instant
her eyes

flickered and in the blue
he rejoiced saw that she
knew remembered loved
just for an instant
before the curtain
closed again.

*A true story. The male nurse present said it
was the first time in two years he’d seen her open
her eyes. She died two weeks later after refusing
all food.*

REGIONAL AND OTHER GROUPS

Mid North Coast

The quarterly meeting was held on 27 November 2018 at Port Panthers with around 70 members and supporters in attendance. The topic for the day was Advance Care Directives, that had been previously requested by members, as a subject to be revisited and updated. The meeting was very informative with strong participation from those present with many questions and experiences related.

Mr. David Horseman, from Ambulance NSW, was one of the guest speakers and provided a great insight into Ambulance operations and how paramedics respond to Advance Care Directives.

Ms. Anne Judd, the Organ & Tissue Donation Specialist Nurse for the Mid North Coast Health District, was another guest speaker and gave a very informative presentation on the many issues associated with the subject of organ and tissue donation. It will enable members to appropriately provide for their wishes. The Leadership Team will endeavour to combine many of the issues raised into our Advance Care Directive document.

Both Anne and David are from Coffs Harbour and generously donated their time and travel, for which we are extremely grateful.

Community Recognition - The Member for Port Macquarie, Mrs. Leslie Williams MP, has officially acknowledged the work of our Convener Annie Quadroy and the Mid North Coast Group of Dying with Dignity NSW. In her recommendation to the Parliament Mrs. Williams commended the valuable contribution to the region that Annie and the group have made through the provision of support and advice for people dealing with the loss of a loved one or the terrible news of a terminal illness.

The Sensational Seniors Expo will again be held at Port Panthers on 18 February 2019 (before publication of this newsletter). This is the third year that the Mid North Coast Group will have a stand at the Expo which provides an excellent opportunity to promote the cause and Dying with

Dignity NSW to a wider audience. Past years has seen many new supporters sign on. Our stand will be manned by volunteers from our member base.

Meeting dates for 2019 are as follows -

28 May 2019
27 August 2019
26 November 2019

Meetings are held at Port Panthers at 10.00am. We look forward to seeing you there again in 2019. Thank you all for your past support.

The meeting room has been provided free of charge by the club since the inception of the group, for which we are extremely appreciative.

Paul Newman

Team member Mid North Coast Group

Email: pmq@dwdnsw.org.au

Central Coast

Although attendance at our final meeting of 2018 was disappointingly low, the reduced numbers did not adversely affect the meeting. DWDNSW President, Penny Hackett, spoke encouragingly on "Towards Achieving Voluntary Assisted Dying in NSW in 2019", the Q&A session was lively as always and the Christmas refreshments ended the session in a very festive mood.

After an extremely welcome holiday, the Committee is settling down to another year of hard work in support of VAD, with an extra meeting already in preparation.

February 15: Professor Ken Hillman, MBBS, FRCA, FCICM, FRCP, Professor of Intensive Care, Liverpool Hospital, University of New South Wales (SWS Clinical School), and author of "A Good Life to the End: Taking control of our inevitable journey through ageing and death" (2017), will be speaking on "Dying with Dignity: the Medicalisation of Dying". We are looking forward very much to hearing Professor Hillman's views.

Friday, 1 March: Meet the Candidates' Forum. We have written to the main parties' candidates for the four Central Coast electorates for the 23 March State Election, requesting their views about the issue of legalising voluntary assisted dying, and inviting their participation in the Forum. We have already received several encouraging replies.

Plans for the meetings for the rest of the year are being considered and we are planning another social get-together in the near future.

Since our last report, two new members have joined our Committee - Helen Seaton and Tiffany Mantzakos - who will be acting as back-ups to Bev (Coordinator) and Joy (Secretary) respectively. They are much needed and very welcome indeed.

Beverley Symons

Coordinator, DWD Central Coast Group

News from Christians Supporting Choice for Voluntary Assisted Dying

From our friends across the Tasman, I have this very moving sermon in strong support of assisted dying from Rev Craig Kilgour, when Interim Moderator at St Columba's Presbyterian Church, Havelock North, New Zealand.

It is quite unique in that Craig's nephew had an assisted death in Canada. The last two paragraphs of the sermon sum up the compassionate Christian approach to assisted dying:

"Let me finish this with what my family members said and repeated often using these words about my nephew's death: It was compassionate, it was humane, it was right and good. And the family are very proud and humbled with the courage he showed in his battle with cancer. And to me no one has the right to be critical and judgemental of the choice he made.

So for me and my family this is not a philosophical debate, it is not a theological debate, it is not a theoretical debate, it is a reality and it was right and my nephew was fortunate he lived in Canada."

Readers can view the complete sermon at News on our website.

I do urge all members of our group and of DWD to do everything possible to talk to and lobby candidates in the March election about their position on VAD support. Let's make it an election issue.



It is 10 years in February since Rev Trevor Bensch (pictured) and I co-founded this Christian VAD support group in 2009, and the observant reader may notice we are introducing a modification to our group name, to reflect the change in terminology used over

those 10 years. We trust you will approve. Sadly, I was advised Trevor had died on the very same day I was drafting this article. I had the utmost regard for Trevor as a true gentleman, a valued friend and a wise mentor for our group.

Rev Bensch said that his call was compassionate and "thoroughly consistent with the teachings of Jesus." Our first publicity in 2009 received many messages of support - here are two:

"With religious maniacs of all stripes adding daily to the world's woes it is refreshing to see (Advertiser 23 Feb) common sense clerics with experience of real life and death willing to take a stand that they know will be incendiary to some groups. Well done Trevor and Ian, the more power to you and your cause."

"Thank you for your stand on VE and the recognition that it is an issue of compassion that transcends narrow dogma. I have written to all members of parliament on two occasions on this issue. Please add my name to your list of people supporting VE."

Ian Wood

National Co-ordinator, Christians Supporting Choice for Voluntary Assisted Dying.

We welcome new member supporters.

Membership is FREE.

Simply go to our website

christiansforve.org.au or email

ian.wood@christiansforve.org.au or write to

Villa 1, 4 Wills Place, Mittagong NSW 2575

MAKING A DONATION

We are totally reliant on membership fees, donations and bequests to operate.

Donations can be made via our website –

	For more information
	Visit www.dwdnsw.org.au

Alternatively, you can make a donation via our other payment options.

Please post your completed form to:

**DWD NSW
PO BOX 25
BROADWAY NSW 2007**

Or scan the completed form and email the copy to us at dwd@dwdnsw.org.au

Payment Details

Please select ONE payment option below:

I will deposit the amount into the Westpac bank account:

Dying with Dignity NSW

BSB: 032 249

Account: 160 719

I enclose a cheque or money order (payable to DWD NSW)

Please charge my Mastercard or Visa Card (as per details below)

First Name:

Surname:

Address:

Phone:

Email:

Card holder name: _____

Card number

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Expiry Date

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CCV number – last 3 digits on back of card

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Card holders signature: _____

Total amount to be charged to your card

\$

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