



Voluntary assisted dying in Western Australia

Supporting someone through the process

Summary

This information sheet is for people who are family members, friends or carers of a person who is considering requesting access to voluntary assisted dying.

Key points include:

- There is no right or wrong way to talk about death. You may find discussing end of life care and voluntary assisted dying complex and emotional.
- Voluntary assisted dying can be a positive experience that allows people to plan and prepare for death. Supporting a patient through the process can help them to have the death they want.
- There are many ways that you can provide practical and emotional support during the voluntary assisted dying process.
- Taking care of yourself is equally important. There are resources available to support you while your friend or family member is considering voluntary assisted dying.

Responding to the person's decision

There is no right or wrong way to talk about death. For many people, discussions about death and planning for end of life are complex and emotional. You may find your family member or friend's decision to ask about voluntary assisted dying hard to understand. Alternatively, you may not be surprised that they are thinking about voluntary assisted dying.

Voluntary assisted dying can be a very positive experience. Family and friends are often comforted by knowing the person can have more choice over the time and place of their death, and be surrounded by people they love, trust and value. It can also give family and friends more time to prepare for and accept the person's death than they would otherwise have. The opportunity to say farewell while the person is still fully aware may help the inevitable grief that people feel when someone they are close to dies.

If your family member or friend decides they want to access voluntary assisted dying, you may not agree with their decision. However, it is their decision. Supporting someone through the process can help them to have the death that they want.

How to support the person

Someone considering voluntary assisted dying will need both emotional and practical support. The best way to know what you can do to provide support is by asking your family member or friend how you can help. Ways you can provide practical assistance may include helping with cooking, cleaning, gardening or driving them to their appointments. You may also take part in their day-to-day care or help the people who are providing this care.

Emotional support can come through connecting with the person in the ways they enjoy. Sharing a conversation, an outing or even just being present can be helpful to someone approaching the end of their life.

Supporting someone as they access the voluntary assisted dying process

You can ask your family member or friend's medical practitioner (doctor) for general information about voluntary assisted dying. However, you cannot request voluntary assisted dying for your family member or friend; only they can make this request. If they decide to make this request, there are many ways that you can continue to support them.

If they want you to, you can attend their appointments during the request and assessment process and be part of their discussions with medical practitioners or other health professionals about voluntary assisted dying. There may be times when the medical practitioner will need to talk with your family member or friend alone and may ask you to leave the room. This is a normal part of the request and assessment process.

As with any medical intervention, access to voluntary assisted dying is subject to strict rules of confidentiality. This means that the medical practitioners who are assessing the patient as they go through the voluntary assisted dying process can only talk with you about the process in detail with the patient's permission.

If your family member or friend has decided that they do not want certain people to know about their decision to access voluntary assisted dying, this will be respected by the medical practitioners and any other staff involved with the process. You should respect this decision too. With the patient's permission, the Coordinating Practitioner (the medical practitioner who is coordinating the process) may ask how you feel about their decision to ask for voluntary assisted dying.

Voluntary assisted dying is the legal process that will enable your family member or friend to access the voluntary assisted dying substance, a medication that will cause their death. If they plan to self-administer the voluntary assisted dying substance (take it themselves), the Coordinating Practitioner may involve you in discussions about a plan for supporting this to happen.

In this instance, your family member or friend will also need to choose a Contact Person. More information on the Contact Person role is in the fact sheets [*Accessing voluntary assisted dying in Western Australia – Choosing a Contact Person*](#) and [*Voluntary assisted dying in Western Australia – Being the Contact Person*](#).

Your family member or friend may ask you to be present when they self-administer the voluntary assisted dying substance, or have it administered by a medical practitioner or nurse practitioner (the Administering Practitioner). If this is right for you, it is important to consider how being present during their death might affect you.

The importance of self-care

As you support your friend or family member through the voluntary assisted dying process, it is important that you take care of yourself too. How you care for yourself will be particularly important if you do not agree with the decision your family member or friend has made to consider voluntary assisted dying, as it could become an added emotional burden.

We know that keeping up good habits such as getting enough sleep, not skipping meals, limiting alcohol consumption, taking regular exercise, getting outdoors, talking to people we trust and doing something we enjoy can go a long way to keeping us mentally and physically healthy.

In addition, there are many health or community-based service providers who can give you extra assistance and work with you to support your emotional wellbeing. If needed, a medical practitioner or nurse practitioner can also develop a mental health care plan with you. With a mental health care plan, you can be referred to a counsellor, mental-health worker or other support service depending on your needs.

There are also a range of services that can provide you with support.

Beyond Blue can provide support for mental health and wellbeing, especially for anyone experiencing anxiety or depression.

- Telephone: 1300 224 636, at any time day or night or access the website www.beyondblue.org.au

The Australian Centre for Grief and Bereavement can help carers, family and friends deal with the death of a loved one and put them in touch with appropriate support groups.

- Telephone: 1800 642 066, Monday to Friday (9:00am – 5:00pm)
or access the website www.grief.org.au

Lifeline can provide crisis support to anyone who is need of immediate help to deal with emotional distress

- Telephone: 13 11 14, at any time day or night or access the website www.lifeline.org.au

If you are a carer for a patient considering voluntary assisted dying

Being the carer for another person can be an overwhelming experience at times. If you are taking part in the day-to-day care of a family member or friend who is approaching the end of their life, it is important that you prioritise your needs and wellbeing as much as possible. If you are providing a lot of practical support, you may be getting physically and emotionally tired.

With the patient's permission, their medical practitioner may help you to understand how their disease will progress and any treatment, palliative care or end-of-life options that are available. Talking to the patient's medical practitioner may help you to find out what type of resources could be available to you, such as special equipment or medical care or additional help if you need a break.

As well as the resources already covered in this information sheet, there are also services specific to carers that can provide you with the support you need.

Carers WA offers a range of programs aimed at providing practical and emotional support for carers in Western Australia. Services include the provision of specialist information, advice and carer support through education/training, social support, young carer services, carer advocacy and representation.

- Telephone: 1300 227 377, Monday to Friday (8:30 am – 4:30 pm)
or access the website www.carerswa.asn.au

The Carer Gateway is a Commonwealth-funded resource available Australia-wide to provide practical advice and support to carers (including in-person peer support, counselling, respite care and financial assistance).

- Telephone: 1800 422 737, Monday to Friday (8:00 am – 5:00 pm)
or access the website www.carergateway.gov.au

In addition, the Western Australian Voluntary Assisted Dying Statewide Care Navigator Service is available to support anyone involved with voluntary assisted dying in WA. This includes family, friends and carers. The Care Navigators are contactable by email and phone during standard work hours (8:30am – 5:00pm) and can answer questions, provide information and connect you to useful resources.

Email: VADcarenavigator@health.wa.gov.au

Phone: (08) 9431 2755

Where can I find more information?

For further information please visit the Department of Health WA website ww2.health.wa.gov.au/voluntaryassisteddying

Glossary of terms

Refer to *Accessing voluntary assisted dying in Western Australia – Glossary of terms* for explanations of key terms used within this information sheet.

Acknowledgement

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