**Introduction from the Minister for Health**

The McGowan Government is committed to improving and strengthening end of life and palliative care for all Western Australians. This is important because end of life care will affect all of us.

In recognition of the importance of this, in May 2018 the Government released the *WA End of Life and Palliative Care Strategy 2018-2028.*

This strategy provides a ten-year vision for improving the lives of all Western Australians through the provision of quality end of life and palliative care.

However, the reality is that even with the best palliative care, some people continue to experience profound suffering at the end of their life.

In November 2018 I announced that the Government will introduce legislation into Parliament to enable voluntary assisted dying in Western Australia.

This discussion paper is a vital step in the progress of that legislation – put simply it is your chance to be heard and help ensure the legislation we introduce has appropriate safeguards for all involved and is world’s best practice.

This decision to introduce legislation was made following the recommendations of the Joint Select Committee on End of Life Choices.

The Joint Select Committee was made up of cross-party membership from both Houses of Parliament and released its report *My Life, My Choice* in August 2018.

The Joint Select Committee made 18 recommendations aimed at strengthening and adapting the way the health system delivers end of life and palliative care.

The McGowan Government has accepted each of those recommendations and recognises that with an ever- growing and ageing population, a renewed focus on the provision of palliative care is vital.

The Joint Select Committee also found that the nature of dying under WA’s existing legal framework can sometimes be extraordinarily difficult for individuals and harrowing for family, friends, communities and first responders.

Unnecessary suffering and broad community support for the principle of autonomy underpinned the Join Select Committee’s recommendation that the WA Government introduce a bill for voluntary assisted dying.

The principle of autonomy means that individuals with terminal suffering have a say in their own end of life.

In accordance with the Joint Select Committee’s recommendations, I established a Ministerial Expert Panel to advise on key issues for the legislation.

The Panel is chaired by Malcolm McCusker AC QC and includes expertise from clinical, legal, consumer, disability, and culturally and linguistically diverse groups.

We are fortunate the have Panel members with a range of skills that will ensure comprehensive consideration of key issues for a legislative framework for voluntary assited dying.

The role of the Panel is not to review the ‘for’ and ‘against’ arguments but to develop recommendations on specific elements, including safeguards, for voluntary assisted dying legislation.

The Panel has identified key questions and issues and is seeking input from experts and across the community. This discussion paper is part of the consultation process.

I am confident that the recommendations made by the Joint Select Committee, together with the comprehensive consultation undertaken by the Panel, in collaboration with the community, will result in legislation that is well informed, workable and includes strong safeguards for those people who wish to access voluntary assisted dying.

This discussion is not just about the healthcare profession. This is a discussion for all of us within the WA community.

Voluntary assisted dying is not a choice between life or death. It is a choice regarding the manner and timing of an expected and unavoidable death.

It will not be a choice which is either appropriate or achievable for everyone at the end of their life but for those people with terminal suffering who wish to access voluntary assisted dying – it is a choice that should be respected.

I encourage all Western Australians to consider taking part in the Panel’s consultations over the next few months to help ensure that the voluntary assisted dying legislation developed for Western Australia is based on the best available evidence and reflects the needs of our diverse State and its people.

The Honourable Roger Cook, MLA

Deputy Premier; Minister for Health; Minister for Mental Health