

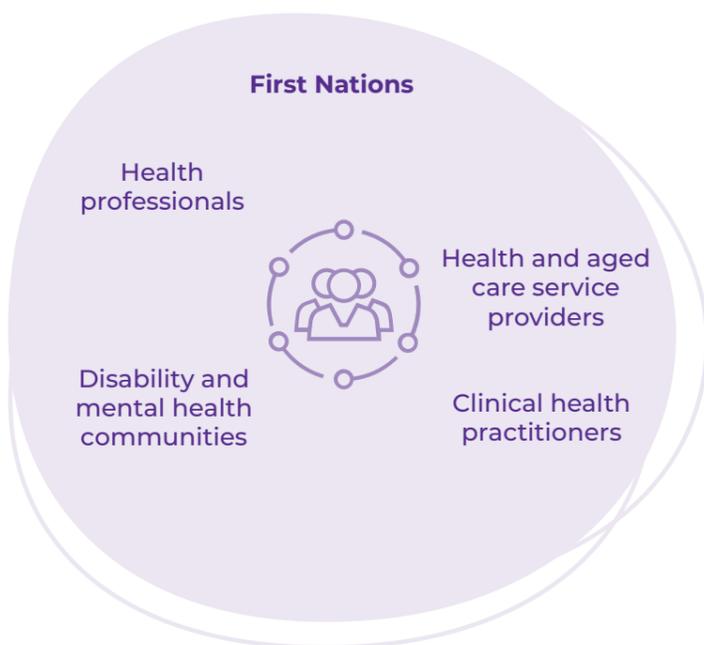
voluntary assisted dying

Conversation Snapshot: Voluntary Assisted Dying Stakeholder Roundtables

First Nations

18 April 2023

Roundtables held



Attendees

- 9 attendees from the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islanders Elected Body, United Ngunnawal Elders Council and others organisations representing First Nations communities held a yarning circle to discuss matters important to them

“There needs to be cultural awareness training specific to voluntary assisted dying, it needs to consider Sorry Business and going back to Country, totems and spirit animals”

Topics most frequently discussed



Creating a **culturally safe space** and process for First Nations peoples

Consideration of how **cultural activities and practices** relating to a person’s passing may need to be **factored into the process** surrounding logistics and administration



Consider the place a person under the age of 18 holds within their community as opposed to the rights as a minor in the broader community – and how this may conflict with the decisions they are asked to make for their family and community

Support and equity to navigate the health system supporting voluntary assisted dying that is appropriate for and tailored to each individual



The need for all participating health practitioners to be **culturally sensitive** to people looking to access the VAD process

Ensuring **information and communication** is provided to people in a way that is **appropriate** for their individual and cultural needs



Matters important to **First Nations peoples** should be **considered and outlined in legislation**, guidance and processes that will underpin voluntary assisted dying in the ACT

What you told us about how the ACT model could work.

Eligibility

- Youth eligibility needs to be clearly outlined in legislation and supporting policy and take into consideration the unique situations of First Nations youth
 - Some youth under 18 are recognised as adults within their communities long before they are of recognised legal age
- The importance of dying on Country
- The right of an eligible First Nations person residing in Canberra to pass on Country other than Ngunnawal Country

Safe and effective process

- Creating a culturally safe space for First Nations people and people from other cultures
 - To support First Nations peoples through a voluntary assisted dying process, all participants agreed that a First Nations practitioner should be involved through each step of the process
- Literacy is an important consideration — information should be provided for a range of language and literacy levels
 - The VAD process needs to be flexible and accessible. e.g. around written requests, to cater for all people who wish to access VAD, regardless of language or literacy
- Voluntary assisted dying legislation, policy, and guidance must consider cultural passing activities and rituals, and this should be factored into planning from the time of request for assessment. It is also important that information is shared on what is left to do once the person passes, as there may be things culturally that people do not want to put their loved ones through
- The consideration of cultural passing rituals was not unique to First Nations peoples, and it should be considered more broadly for the ACT community

- A process should be in place for mandatory reporting if someone were to present to a practitioner wanting to seek voluntary assisted dying because of the mental health condition they are living with

Other important issues

- Recording the cause of death on certificates may also be a consideration for other people outside of First Nations communities
- Looking after the loved one’s spirit is a priority. How this will be considered through the legislation, policy, and supporting guidance is important to First Nations people
- In many circumstances, people would need or benefit from the support of a navigation process. The ACT Government needs to ensure equity of access to people not only through the available information but also through how relevant practitioners can assess and see people
- A clear explanation for the management and administration of medication is needed for people participating in the process
- First Nations peoples need a qualified First Nations person or representative should they need someone to administer the substance on their behalf
- Health pathways can be hard to navigate, and equity of access is important — with potential added literacy and cultural barriers, support may be needed to navigate the VAD process logistically

“Consistent Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander representation throughout the documentation and information throughout the process”