



Discussion guide 4 of 5

The role of health professionals and health services in voluntary assisted dying

The ACT Government acknowledges the many Canberrans who have experienced, or are experiencing, suffering in the face of illness, disease, and medical conditions. We also acknowledge the hardships and grief experienced by their loved ones and carers.

This Discussion Guide contains information that may be distressing or uncomfortable. If you need support, contact [Lifeline](#) on **13 11 14** or [Griefline](#) on **1300 845 745**.

Introduction

The ACT Government invites Canberrans to share their views on how a voluntary assisted dying model is designed for the ACT. We are committed to listening, learning and understanding our community's experiences in developing our approach to voluntary assisted dying in the ACT.

To help you provide your views on voluntary assisted dying, a series of short Discussion Guides are available. These Guides summarise

five key themes explored in a longer Discussion Paper including principles, eligibility, the process, the role of health practitioners and health services, administration of substance, and monitoring and compliance.

The role of health professionals in voluntary assisted dying

We want to know how you think health professionals might help make voluntary assisted dying work in the ACT. To help you think about this topic and provide your views, here is a summary of some of the roles of health professionals in other places in Australia:

Helping a person through the voluntary assisted dying process

In other places in Australia, a person gets help from health professionals to follow a process before they can access voluntary assisted dying. For more information, see [Discussion Guide 3: What process should a person follow to access voluntary assisted dying?](#)

We want to make sure health professionals have the right training and skills to help someone through the voluntary assisted dying process. But we also want to ensure that it is not too difficult for a person to find a health professional who can help if they need it.

In other places in Australia, a doctor (meaning a general practitioner or medical specialist) can assess whether a person can access voluntary

assisted dying and help them through the process. The doctor must complete voluntary assisted dying training and have a minimum level of experience and skills. For example, some states say a doctor must have five years' experience to be able to assess a person. Some states say a doctor must have expertise or be a specialist in treating the person's illness.

Because the ACT is smaller than other states, there might not be many doctors who can help with voluntary assisted dying. If it is too hard to find a doctor, some people who are eligible might not be able to access voluntary assisted dying. We want to know if other types of health professionals with the right skills and experience, such as nurse practitioners, should be able to help a person through the voluntary assisted dying process.

Talking to a person about voluntary assisted dying

We want to know if you think a health professional in the ACT should be allowed to start a conversation with a person about voluntary assisted dying.

In some states in Australia, health professionals are banned from starting a conversation about voluntary assisted dying with their patients. The patient must start the conversation themselves. In other places, a health professional can only start a conversation about voluntary assisted dying if they also provide information and other options.

Voluntary assisted dying must be a person's free choice. But if a health professional cannot start a conversation about voluntary assisted dying with their patients, this can make it difficult to provide patients with information about all of their end of life options, and support them to make decisions.

Dealing with the voluntary assisted dying substance

We want to know your views on what responsibilities a health professional should have in relation to a voluntary assisted dying substance.

A voluntary assisted dying substance is a medication prescribed by a doctor to cause a person's death at the end of the voluntary assisted dying process. Health professionals help make sure a voluntary assisted dying substance is not available to a person until the person is assessed as eligible and has followed the voluntary assisted dying process.

In other states in Australia, health professionals have various roles and responsibilities:

- A voluntary assisted dying substance can only be prescribed by a doctor
- When prescribing a voluntary assisted dying substance to a person, the doctor must provide the person with information and report to an independent monitoring agency
- A voluntary assisted dying substance can only be provided by a pharmacist, and sometimes the pharmacist must have extra training and approval
- When providing a voluntary assisted dying substance to a person, a pharmacist must give the person information and warnings, and sometimes must verify the person's identity to make sure the substance is provided to the right person
- A health professional can help the person use the substance when they are ready if it is not possible or not appropriate for a person to use the substance themselves.

Protecting health professionals

If health professionals follow the law, they should be able to help with voluntary assisted dying without fear of unintentionally committing a crime. We want to know your views on how we can protect health professionals who are involved in voluntary assisted dying, but also make sure there are serious consequences for people who do the wrong thing.

For more information, see Discussion Guide 5: How could we monitor voluntary assisted dying to make sure processes are safe and effective?

Health professionals who do not want to help with voluntary assisted dying

Some health professionals might not want to help with voluntary assisted dying because this is not their area of expertise, or because they are not available.

Other health professionals might not want to help because their personal, cultural, or religious beliefs do not support voluntary assisted dying. This is called a 'conscientious objection'. In other places in Australia, health professionals are allowed to have a 'conscientious objection' and not help a person with voluntary assisted dying.

In some places in Australia, a health professional with a 'conscientious objection' must provide a person with information about other health professionals or organisations who could help or refer a person to another health professional. We want to know your views on how to protect the rights of health professionals to uphold their beliefs, while also protecting Canberrans who want to access voluntary assisted dying

The role of health services in voluntary assisted dying

We want to know your views on how a person should access voluntary assisted dying if they are living or staying at a health service, such as hospitals, palliative care hospices, or aged care homes.

People who want to access voluntary assisted dying are often living or staying at a health facility. Some health services do not support voluntary assisted dying and do not allow a person to access voluntary assisted dying at their facilities. This is usually because of faith-based beliefs that do not support voluntary assisted dying.

We have a small number of health services in the ACT, which includes a combination of faith-based and non-faith-based services. Most palliative care in the ACT is provided by faith-based services. Palliative care is treatment,

care and support that helps a person with a terminal illness to live as fully and as comfortably as possible.

Some states in Australia have not specified the role of health services in their voluntary assisted dying laws and have instead provided guidance for these services.

Other places have made laws that health services must not prevent a person from accessing voluntary assisted dying at a facility where they live or stay. Health services must allow health professionals to visit a facility to help a person through the voluntary assisted dying process. If this is not possible, a health service must transfer a person to a place where they can access voluntary assisted dying.

There are different rules for people who live permanently at a health service, for example, an aged care home, and people who stay temporarily at a health service such as a hospital. Some states also require health services to put information on their website that informs the public about their views on voluntary assisted dying.

How can I share my views?

To share your views on how a voluntary assisted dying model is designed for the ACT, visit the [YourSay website](#) by 6 April 2023. There are many ways you can have your say.

If you need help to access information or have your say, please call Access Canberra on 13 22 81.

If you would like some more detailed information about these issues and why we want your views, please read the [Discussion Paper](#).