



HammondCare

An independent Christian charity

7 September 2017

The Hon. Greg Donnelly MLC
Parliament House
Macquarie Street
Sydney NSW 2000

Dear Mr Donnelly,

This letter is to request your immediate review, and encourage your ultimate rejection of, the proposed NSW Voluntary Assisted Dying Bill 2017. This Bill fails to address the underlying reasons that people request assisted suicide and euthanasia, and undermines the value that we as a community place on human life.

The impacts of the changes proposed within the Bill will extend well beyond the individuals requesting medical assistance to hasten death. Should it pass, there is a grave risk that older people and those living with disability or life limiting illness will feel worthless and burdensome or be exposed to unprecedented pressure from family or society at large to end their life.

Evidence from overseas suggests that certain groups – including older people and people with disabilities – are particularly vulnerable to legislative creep. For example, in the Netherlands, the people able to access euthanasia has expanded significantly since legislation permitting hastened death was first introduced. Last year, more than 400 people in that country died by euthanasia as a result of dementia, psychiatric reasons and “advanced age”. In October 2016, the Dutch government signalled an intention to draft a law to legalise assisted suicide for people who feel they have “completed life”, while in Belgium, people under the age of 18 may utilise assisted suicide laws.

More must be done to remedy the fact that too many people endure “bad deaths”, suffering pain and other symptoms, a lack of dignity and emotional turmoil. However the solution does not lie in hastening death. Instead, the focus must be on improving end of life care through high quality palliative care services. Palliative care provides holistic relief from pain and other distressing symptoms while also supporting the psychological, emotional, spiritual and existential needs that often lead to requests for assisted suicide or euthanasia. In fact, based on the experience of HammondCare’s palliative care specialists, no request for assisted suicide should truly be considered informed when the person making it has not engaged meaningfully with palliative care services.

HammondCare

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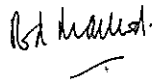
We have enormous sympathy for those who endure suffering at the end of their life. We also believe wholeheartedly in the benefits of high quality palliative care. Greater investment in palliative care research, education, training and services in a range of settings for all Australians is essential. This is where our attention and resources must be directed. To commit to killing, even on a person's voluntary request, detracts from this need and fails our most vulnerable.

We urge you not to support this Bill and would welcome the opportunity to discuss this important topic further.

Yours sincerely,



Dr Stephen Judd
Chief Executive
HammondCare



Prof Roderick MacLeod
Senior Palliative Care Physician
HammondCare

About HammondCare

HammondCare is an independent Christian charity specialising in dementia and aged care, palliative care, rehabilitation and older persons' mental health.

Regarded nationally and internationally as one of Australia's most innovative health and aged care providers, HammondCare offers hospital care, residential care and community services.