



# Update

## on Euthanasia and Assisted Suicide

August 2018

## Euthanasia bill voted down

*FamilyVoice State Director David d'Lima explains why the Senate rightly rejected the Liberal Democrat's Bill to give territories the legislative power to legalise euthanasia.*

On 15 August the Upper House of Federal Parliament narrowly upheld the two-decades ban on death by lethal injection, following a vigorous campaign by pro-life organisations that warned against euthanasia.

But it is thoroughly disconcerting that Senators in 2018 felt the need to re-visit this life and death issue.

No new evidence had come to light to promote euthanasia, but there are examples of the terrible consequences.

There are the cases of three children in Belgium who were legally euthanised in 2016 and 2017. A nine-year-old was euthanised for having a brain tumour and an 11-year-old for having cystic fibrosis. A 17-year-old was killed due to suffering from muscular dystrophy. Among the 4337 Belgians euthanised in that period, 19 were aged 18-29.

In 2016 it was reported that in Oregon that almost half the people who died after taking lethal "medicine" took their fatal decision so as not to burden others. The oft-repeated mantra about autonomy and individual rights is thoroughly fictional when we realise people are making decisions because of perceived problems for others.

But the matter becomes even more problematic when we consider the burdens faced by the dying and their families. Moral burdens would arise if a dying person were to ask the family for its views on choosing between a quick, cheap injection - and the option of longer and expensive palliation.

The dying person, to protect the family from soul-searching and heated quarrels, may decide to bear this burden alone and opt for sudden death - not realising this can seriously prevent the resolution of grief. Such a sudden departure can eliminate the possibility of family members reconciling, healing emotional hurts, and resolving unfinished issues.



By David d'Lima

But natural death, when managed well by modern pain relief and palliative care, often gives greater opportunity for "closure", saying good-bye, and for seeking and receiving forgiveness and reconciliation.

Consider also the legal burdens that would arise as more people become the victims of those who

would deliberately take life without consent. Laws that should punish such people are only enforceable if witnesses lay charges and testify in court - but this asks too much of the bereaved, who must bear silently the burden of non-action against those who commit (or suggest) homicide.

Finally, there is the shift in culture, whereby the will to prosecute and to convict is undermined once the principle of "do no harm" is breached.

Parliament did well to consider the research into the seven people who expressed interest in dying by lethal injection when euthanasia was lawful in the Northern Territory. A *Lancet* journal paper by Kissane, Street and Nitschke (October 3, 1998) found none of the seven people experienced intolerable pain. Instead, "Fatigue, frailty, depression, and other symptoms contributed more to the suffering of patients."

The Territory certainly has plenty of fatigued, frail and depressed people who greatly need

encouragement and support, but not euthanasia. It is home to a large population of our beloved Indigenous people whose difficulties are many and whose vulnerability is deeply concerning.

As the Northern Territory is a creation of the Commonwealth, the Federal Parliament has wisely voted to protect all Territorians, and especially those who are vulnerable, from the multitude of harms linked to the legalisation of euthanasia. ■



*Euthanasia emanates from a culture of death, rather than a culture of life*

## Health Minister opposes euthanasia

Federal Health Minister Greg Hunt has spoken out against the push by Senator David Leyonhjelm to grant ACT and Northern Territory the right to legalise euthanasia.



Greg Hunt MLA

In reaching his decision, Minister Hunt said he was particularly concerned for older Australians.

"I don't support euthanasia in Australia for the very simple message that it sends to older Australians about how they are valued," he said.

The Australian Medical Association and palliative care specialists across the country remain opposed to legislation allowing euthanasia or assisted suicide.

A doctors' group from WA is concerned that the proposed Restoring Territory Rights (Assisted Suicide Legislation) Bill would lead to the implementation of assisted suicide and euthanasia regimes in the territories, which would then spread to other states. Victoria has already passed euthanasia laws, which will come into effect in 2019.

"We are grateful to live in an age and a country where palliative care is an accepted and integral part of end of life care", said Dr Lachlan Dunjey, a spokesman for the WA group.

However, he added, "The ACT and NT are much smaller populations than the States each with 25 MPs - only 13 being needed to pass legislation - and lacking the protection of an upper house of review, this facilitates passing of legislation inimical to the welfare of Australia as a whole."

The group believed it was only appropriate for the Federal Government to overrule laws that sanction the killing of people. The Federal intervention was also justified because euthanasia "weakens the national push to reduce suicide in Australia." ■