dying with dignity victoria

Newsletter #208, Jul 2025

President's Report

Jane Morris

In my last report I stated that we had started the first few months of the year at a frenetic pace. Well, I didn't think it possible but somehow the pace has ramped up a few more notches!

Earlier this year the State Labor government, in addition to accepting the recommendations provided in an independent 5-year review of Victoria's Voluntary Assisted Dying legislation, announced that they would draft a bill to include much needed amendments to the VAD Act 2017. These amendments are intended to ensure equity in access for those individuals the Act originally intended to help. Unfortunately, we have seen that some of the rigid legislative safeguards reluctantly agreed to at the time of the 2017 debate have created barriers to access and proved discriminatory for some individuals.

Many of the MPs involved in the 2017 VAD Parliamentary debate have left Parliament. We therefore elected to take on the task of canvassing views of current MPs regarding the VAD Act and the proposed amendments. This has proved to be a huge undertaking but very rewarding. We emailed all Victorian MPs and followed up with a phone call in which a meeting was suggested. We have been surprised by the number of MPs eager to meet with us and have been greatly appreciative of the time they have allocated us. We will continue this work and make ourselves available to answer any queries or questions. Michelle Hindson formed an advocacy subcommittee which meets every two weeks. The work so far accomplished is extraordinary. I want to thank all members of the subcommittee and especially the three incredibly accomplished volunteers, Emily, Lisa and Lissie, who have so generously offered their wise counsel and expertise. Their contribution is proving invaluable.

We are unsure when the bill will be tabled in Parliament but are fervently hoping that it will be this year.

Reports of the sad death of former AFL player Robert Walls dominated news around Australia. It was interesting to see the emphasis placed on his VAD death by some media outlets while others only casually referred to it, indicative of the increased acceptance of VAD in our society. We acknowledge the courage and selfless actions of the Walls family in publicly sharing this story.

We have received wonderful feedback from some individuals who have participated in the Griefline/DWDV support group pilot program, now in its second year. Several group sessions have been completed this year as well as a pre-VAD drop-in session.

At the time of writing, we have just completed our 600th witnessing. This is an incredible achievement and has only been achievable because of our amazing volunteer witnesses under the capable direction of the equally amazing Nat, our General Manager.

It has been exciting to see an increase in the number of Young Ambassadors across Australia. Some of them met with Dr Cam McLaren, who very kindly agreed to attend an online Q&A session. It was a great success and as always Cam generously shared his extensive VAD knowledge and expertise. Young Ambassadors Olivia Nicholls and Tara McDonald accompanied Michelle and me on one of our visits to Parliament House where we met with several MPs to discuss the proposed VAD amendments.

Continued on page 2

President's Report (cont.)

Many of our Board members were delighted to attend an event at the Wheeler Centre at which renowned photographer Julian Kingma and Andrew Denton were interviewed by Marieke Hardy about the release of Kingma's book 'The Power of Choice'.

This is a collection of powerful, intimate portraits and stories of individuals nearing the end of their lives who chose VAD. Several nights later we attended the opening night of Julian's brilliant and incredibly successful exhibition. Congratulations to Julian and Go Gentle Australia.

I would also like to extend our thanks to Keryn and the team at 'Fancy Films' who again have helped with the filming of several short videos which we hope to be able to share soon.

As always there is an abundance of VAD information from overseas and around Australia.

We have already achieved so much this year. I wish to extend my sincere thanks to all our Board members, our incredible volunteers, our General Manager, Nat and Michelle Hindson who never ceases to amaze me with all that she achieves!

The Young Ambassadors

We're thrilled to announce that Dying With Dignity Victoria's abstract submission has been accepted for presentation at the prestigious Advance Care Planning International Conference, to be held on the Gold Coast in September.

The presentation, "A Youthful Approach to End-of-Life Care Decision Making and Advance Care Planning," will spotlight the remarkable work of our Young Ambassadors (YA) program—a growing, dynamic initiative that is inspiring the next generation to engage with end-of-life issues through empathy, education, and advocacy.

Since launching in late 2023 with just four participants, the YA program has expanded to 23 ambassadors across Australia. At the conference, we'll be showcasing how these young leaders are using lived experience, digital platforms, and creative outreach to inform and empower their peers on topics like voluntary assisted dying, advance care planning, and end-of-life rights.

From developing youth-specific resources and media campaigns to speaking on radio and engaging with policymakers, our YAs are shifting the conversation and making a powerful impact. We are proud to be sharing this work with a global audience and contributing to a broader conversation about how diverse communities—especially younger voices—can shape compassionate end-of-life care and planning.

dying with dignity victoria

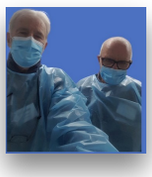
Email: dwdv@dwdv.org.au
Phone: 0491 718 632
Address: PO Box 22, Camberwell, VIC 3124

Volunteer Week

May 19-25 was National Volunteer Week, Australia's largest annual celebration of volunteering. This special event highlights the important role of volunteers in the community and invites people not currently volunteering to give it a go.

This year we chose to refer each day to an area of our work in which our volunteers play a critical and valuable role.

Day 1. We acknowledged our amazing volunteer witnesses and related the story of Dietmar and James who attended a witnessing together and struck up an immediate and firm friendship. The story is one of happiness, trust and sadness founded upon an incredible generosity of spirit. See story on our website.



Day 2. We celebrated the wonderful Nicole Grundy, an End-of-Life Doula who played an instrumental role in developing our VAD 1:1 peer support program and is now involved in our Griefline/DWDV support groups pilot program.

Day 3. It was Lisa Hindson's turn. Lisa has not only spent many hours carrying out valuable research for us but has also agreed to volunteer her time as a Project Manager for our Young Ambassador program and help on our advocacy sub-committee.

Day 4. Our incredible Young Ambassadors cannot be forgotten. We mentioned Eve Crotty who has numerous times shared her late mother's VAD story and even caught the eye of Federal MP Monique Ryan!

Day 5. Emily Maguire expressed interest in volunteering her time and expertise as part of our advocacy sub-committee. She has provided, and continues to provide, outstanding advice on strategy development and stakeholder management. Thank you Emily, you have taught us all so much!

Day 6. We acknowledged the amazing individuals who volunteer their time not only on the DWDV Board but other Assisted Dying organisations around Australia and the world.

Day 7. Last but certainly not least are those who so selflessly and courageously share the stories of a loved one's end-of-life experience. We know that these stories have proven to be immensely powerful and persuasive tools in achieving change.

There are several other volunteers whose work is greatly appreciated. Lissie Ratcliffe, a strategic advisor and former Premier's C.O.S, has so generously provided us with invaluable guidance regarding amendment advocacy. Anna Philip, a Young Ambassador who lives in Darwin, has been very active with VAD advocacy for the NT and has been a valuable member of a larger working group. We also want to thank Marty Suchta and Jono Simko, for helping us set up and change over to our new website.

2025 National Grief Survey + Let's Talk About Grief: Help us make grief more visible.

Grief is part of life — yet too often; it's met with silence or misunderstanding.

Griefline invites you to take part in Let's Talk About Grief 2025 — a national initiative to make grief more visible, better understood, and more compassionately supported.

There are two ways you can be involved.

1. Take the 2025 National Grief Survey. If you've experienced grief in the last 12 months, we invite you to share your experience. It's anonymous, takes just 10–15 minutes, and every voice makes a difference. Survey closes: 31 August 2025

2. Share your story for Let's Talk About Grief. If grief has touched your life at any point in time, you're invited to share your story through our national storytelling campaign during Grief Awareness Month in August. Submissions open until 26 July.

Links to participate in the survey and to share your story are on the Griefline website here:

https://griefline.org.au/2025-national-grief-survey/

Your insights could help shape how grief is seen, spoken about, and supported across Australia. Let's build a more compassionate, grief-informed Australia — together.

A Life in Pictures

by Dr Nick Carr

Nick in 2042?

When I worked in London back in the 1980s, I did 6 months in Geriatrics (as it was called back then).

Wonderfully, the hospital specialising in aged care was called New End.

One of my patients was a wizened little Indian man. Ravaged by end stage dementia, he was bed-bound and curled into a foetal ball, the inevitable result of muscle contractures. He could give me no information, and that might have been all I knew of him – but New End encouraged families to bring photo albums of their loved ones.

I leafed through the book at the end of this man's bed, and I was astonished by what I saw.

There he was, a lithe, muscular young man in a sequinned leotard high on a trapeze in the Indian circus.

I looked from the book and the man I saw before me had transformed. Yes, still curled into a dreamy, mumbling circle, but also now alive in my mind's eye. Spinning, tumbling, flying.

None of us hope to end our days in aged care, but no doubt some of us will. So be prepared, have some photos ready. Then the staff will have a chance to know the vital younger person you once were.

I'm starting now ...

Nick at Iguacu Falls, 1987

Research Opportunity

Attention Victorian VAD Trained Medical Practitioners!

Do you care about sustainability of the VAD medical workforce?

Would you be happy to share your experiences (both positive and challenging) of the VAD training and practice?

Please consider offering a little time to participate in the following research project: *"Identifying Strategies to Sustain the Medical Voluntary Assisted Dying Workforce in Victoria*".

- Managed by: Peter MacCallum Cancer Centre in conjunction with the University of Melbourne.
- Ethics approval: HREC Reference: HREC/111372/PMCC.
- Project aims: to explore and understand the experiences of Medical Practitioners (MPs) trained to provide VAD services across Victoria, to:
  - Understand the enablers and challenges faced by those working in VAD
  - Explore factors preventing MPs participating in VAD once training has been completed, and
  - Identify strategies and solutions that assist and support MPs to start and/or continue their practice in VAD services.

- The research will involve interviews to explore MPs experiences, perceptions, and the barriers and enablers to their participation in VAD services. We would like to hear from MPs who have completed the VAD training and gone on to participate OR NOT in providing VAD services.
- Following the interviews, two sequential workshops will be conducted with MPs to develop and refine strategies and solutions to inform recommendations to improve sustainability of the VAD workforce in Victoria, and nationwide. The recommendations will be widely communicated to ensure real-world impact.
- MPs can participate in an interview or a workshop only, or both.

Follow this link to read more and to express your interest in participating:

https://redcap.petermac.org.au/surveys/?s=3K97DLDHHHH7P7E9

If you know a VAD-trained MP who may be interested in participating in this research, please pass this information onto them.

Questions? Contact Kristen Kappel - kristen.kappel@petermac.org or 0456 717 220.

Peter Mac
Peter MacCallum Cancer Centre
Victoria Australia

NEWS FROM AUSTRALIA ...

Australian Capital Territory

The ACT Health Minister tabled a consultation report into the issue of loss of capacity in relation to VAD in the Parliament. The government says it will wait at least a year after VAD is safely and successfully implemented before considering any changes to the law.

The consultation had been in response to a resolution passed by the ACT Legislative Assembly in June 2024, following the successful passage of the VAD Act. VAD will become available to ACT residents from 3 November 2025.

Northern Territory

There has been a lot happening in The NT. Justine Davis, Independent MP for Johnston, tabled a motion in the NT Legislative Assembly on May 14 to request that Chief Minister Lia Finocchiaro's CLP government adopt the 22 recommendations made by a 2024 Expert Advisory panel set up as part of a community consultation process.

The same day the Attorney-General announced an amendment asking the Legal and Constitutional Affairs to undertake a new inquiry that would this time replace the previous panel's independent experts with politicians. The committee is comprised of three CLP MPs, one Green and one Labor and the findings of the inquiry must be delivered by the end of September.

Advocates of VAD have criticised the Government for its stalling tactics. Labor Leader Selena Uibo has also initiated the process of drafting a Private Member's Bill to legislate for VAD. She said the Bill would be released for broad community consultation before returning to parliament for a conscience vote. But she says she can give no timeline for the process.

... AND AROUND THE WORLD

Belgium

Belgian lawmakers are looking at a controversial amendment to the country's 20-year-old assisted dying law. This amendment would allow individuals diagnosed with dementia to seek an assisted death on the condition they sign a "Declaration of Intent" while still mentally competent. In 2002, Belgium was the second country in the world to legalise VAD.

Chile

On June 5, the Chilean President introduced a bill intended to amend an assisted dying bill that had been introduced into the lower house almost 14 years ago. The Senate Health Committee is currently considering the bill but opposition from the church is fierce.

Cyprus

A VAD bill that has been fiercely debated in the Cypriot Parliament has been put on hold until after January 2026, after a parliamentary committee has decided to prioritise palliative care legislation.

Estonia

The issue of VAD has been referred to after a man was acquitted in the Esotonian Supreme Court for providing devices to people so that they could end their lives. This was not considered a healthcare service and therefore he could not be accused of conducting economic activity without a license.

... AND AROUND THE WORLD

France

The French Assembly passed the “right to have an assisted death” bill 75 to 41 votes. A full vote then took place in the National Assembly on May 27 and passed 305-199 votes. The legislation will now move to the Senate sometime in the next few months. French bishops have called on all Catholics in France to take personal action to challenge their representatives in Parliament who are preparing to vote on the bill.

Greece

A survey carried out with 1207 individuals found that 60% favoured withdrawing life support from those in a deep coma with no chance of recovery and that 43% favoured VAD and a further 28% agreed on the condition that the patient’s family consented.

Italy

Tuscany has carried out its first assisted death after a Constitutional Court ruling. The right to die has been technically legal since 2019 but not translated into national legislation.

Malta

The Maltese government has launched a public consultation on VAD and a first community meeting on a VAD consultation document has been held. The Malta nurses’ union supports VAD but argues that it should not take place in a hospital setting but in a place “designated for that purpose”. Opponents say that proposed Assisted Dying legislation poses significant ethical and systemic concerns, particularly for the elderly.

New Zealand

New Zealand published the Annual Service Report on their Assisted Dying Service 2024.

Serbia

The Serbian Medical Society assembled a panel of law professors to discuss the question of whether the Serbian Civil Code would allow the introduction of regulated assisted dying in Serbia. It seems the consensus was that it does.

Switzerland

Switzerland has a new assisted dying organisation, Athanasios. It is reported to be considerably cheaper than some of the other Swiss options.

Taiwan

A majority of the Taiwanese population support physician-assisted dying in cases involving terminal illness, long-term physical pain, and severe cognitive impairment, according to a study by National Taiwan University's College of Public Health.

... AND AROUND THE WORLD

United Kingdom

The Terminally Ill Adults (End of Life) Bill passed through the House of Commons last year by a margin of 55, and was subsequently intensely scrutinised by a parliamentary committee for 6 months. On June 20 it was voted on in the House of Commons and approved with a majority of 23 MPs. The Bill will now be sent to the House of Lords to be voted on later this year.

The leadup up to the June 20 vote had been fraught with misinformation and fear mongering stories. Organisations such as the Royal College of Psychiatrists and the Royal College of Physicians, who had maintained a neutral VAD stance, withdrew their support. Some members of the disability sector expressed their contempt for the Bill and it was suggested that women could be pressured into VAD by abusive husbands. MPs were provided with a conscience vote.

Wales

Recently there has been confusion as to how VAD legislation would be implemented in Wales, should it pass the House of Lords. The Welsh NHS has said it will only help terminally ill people end their lives if the Senedd agrees to it first. If not, the situation could arise where VAD could be legal in Wales but without a service to make it available.

Scotland

Exciting news from Scotland – a Private Member's bill to legalise assisted dying in Scotland has passed an initial vote at Holyrood 70 votes to 56. The bill, brought forward by Liberal Democrat MSP Liam McArthur, must now clear two more hurdles in order to become law. The first will allow MSPs to further scrutinise the bill and propose amendments before a final vote. Two previous bills failed to reach this stage.

Jersey

Jersey will decide whether to officially legalise assisted dying later this year. The draft law will be published in early September and then subjected to 14 weeks of political scrutiny before a final debate and vote in early December. If passed, the legislation is expected to become operative in 2027.

United States

For the first time since a Medical Aid in Dying Act was introduced in 2016, both the **New York** State Assembly and the Senate have passed the bill. On April 29, the Assembly voted 81-67 in favour, and on June 9, the Senate passed it 35-27. The legislation now awaits approval by Governor Kathy Hochul.

Oregon's attempts to broaden access to its assisted dying regime have been watered down but there is still some improvement promised. The 15-day waiting period has been cut to seven days rather than the 48 hours originally suggested and instead of the original proposal to allow Nurse Practitioners to participate in the process, they will now be allowed to do so under the supervision of a doctor.

The **Delaware** Governor has signed a bill legalizing Medical Aid in Dying, making Delaware the 12th jurisdiction in the United States to provide assisted dying.

In **Maine** an amendment to the MAID Act has been signed into law. This amendment will allow physicians to use their clinical discretion to waive up to 10 days of the 17-day waiting period for patients deemed eligible.

In **Illinois** a MAID Bill passed in the House in May but was not called for a vote in the Senate before the Legislature adjourned on June 1.

DWDV VAD Support Groups in partnership with Griefline

DWDV continues to partner with Griefline to provide support for the families, friends and carers of people choosing VAD, both during and after the VAD process.

We know some people have no-one to talk to about their experience, while others prefer not to discuss what may be considered a 'contentious' topic.

Our support groups offer a safe space for you to connect and share with other people who will understand and appreciate your VAD journey and can relate to the uniqueness of loss and grief associated with VAD.

Our support groups are held online via Zoom so they are available to adults from anywhere in Australia.

There is ***pre-VAD*** support available if you are preparing for the death of a family member or friend who has chosen VAD. Drop-in sessions are held on the first Thursday of each month.

There are ***post-VAD*** support groups available if you are seeking support after a loved one has used VAD.

These groups are 6-week programs run on Tuesdays (nights) and Wednesdays (daytime).

If you or someone you know is interested in attending one of these VAD support programs, please register your interest at https://griefline.org.au/get-help/vad-support-groups/. There is no cost to participate.

If you have any questions about the groups, please don't hesitate to email us at support@dwdv.org.au or call the office on 0491 718 632.

VAD Poetry

Here is a wonderful paper from the Australasian Journal on Aging for those that may find reading scientific/legal papers challenging.

This is perfect, thank you: Research poetry on gratitude for voluntary assisted dying in Victoria, Australia

https://onlinelibrary.wiley.com/doi/10.1111/ajag.70019

The paper looks at how those involved in seeking VAD discuss the concept of gratitude for this end-of-life option.

The findings are presented through research poetry, an arts-based form of research - a refreshing and novel approach in the field.

Access the paper via the above link from the Wiley online library, where you can also download a pdf copy.

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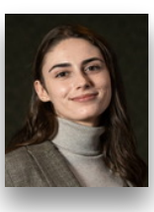

Danielle Clarke

Danielle Jacobs

Dr Adam Steinberg

Can you help us with a donation?

We are deeply appreciative of the amazing work done by all our volunteers, but we also rely on the generosity of donors and other benefactors to help us support the right to individual end-of-life choices through voluntary assisted dying, advocate for improvements to current laws and provide support and education for individuals, organisations and communities.

You can do so through our secure online form via a Donate button here: https://www.dwdv.org.au
(All online donations are processed securely using Stripe.)
Alternatively, contact our office for details to make a payment by direct bank transfer or cheque.

We are a Deductible Recipient Charity, so all donations over $2 are tax deductible.