



9 August 2018

Dear Minister,

**Deep Concerns raised by Restoring Territory Rights (Assisted Suicide Legislation) Bill 2015.**

Catholic Health Australia (CHA) and its members are deeply concerned that Senator David Leyonhjelm's proposed "Restoring Territory Rights (Assisted Suicide Legislation) Bill 2015" serves to distract from the shameful reality of inadequate access to palliative and End of Life care in this country, contributing to a widespread fear of death and dying. Legislating for euthanasia and assisted suicide would have dangerous unintended consequences for our vulnerable Australians including Indigenous, ethnic, disabled, and our elderly, and has been consistently opposed by national and international medical experts.

CHA members are some of the longest serving health and hospital service providers across Australia, providing more than 50% of palliative care services to rural and remote Australians. It is troubling that this bill has arisen at a time when an ACT inquiry into End-of-life care has revealed inadequate access to palliative care across the territory.

The most recent data from the Australian Institute of Health and Welfare states that in 2016 there was an insufficient 226 specialist palliative medicine physicians across all Australia, with only six palliative care specialists available in the ACT and a scant four in the NT to service an area 1.421 million kilometres squared. We are gravely concerned about the potentially dangerous impact this legislation would have, undermining the medical profession, devaluing palliative care, and desensitising public attitudes to suicide.

Our Medical professionals believe palliative care must be resourced as a priority and provision made for all Australians to experience a positive end of life. Those living with terminal illness require some of the greatest levels of support. Should we not be investing our every effort into enhancing and innovating palliative care to ensure our loved one's experience a compassionate and comfortable end of life?

The Hippocratic Oath states, *'I will not administer poison to anyone where asked,'* and I will *'do no harm.'* The World Medical Association (WMA) states *'Physician assisted suicide, like euthanasia, is unethical and must be condemned,'* and has called on governments around the world to reject VAD and euthanasia legislation stating that *'vulnerable people will be placed at risk of abuse.'*

Research and medical experts worldwide agree this legislation exposes our most vulnerable Australians, the elderly, the frail, our Indigenous, people with disabilities, and those from culturally and linguistically diverse backgrounds, to genuine and significant risks of misinformation and abuse with coercion a real threat. The NT population is comprised of 25.5 percent Indigenous Australians, whose cultures oppose euthanasia under traditional lore. These communities are working tirelessly to reduce shocking rates of suicide, and mistrust of the medical system, yet still experience a profound shortage of health services, limited health literacy, and language barriers.

Priority must be given to creating a peaceful and positive end of life experience for every Australian. The conversation should not be about assisted killing but rather enhancing a loved one's final days. We urge you to stand for positive and compassionate end of life, voting no to the Bill, and investing your energy into making policy that enhances and improves palliative care and the end of life experience for all. Should you require further information on the CHA position of End of Life care please see our [submissions](#) or contact me directly [suzanneg@cha.org.au](mailto:suzanneg@cha.org.au).

Thank you for your time.

Yours sincerely,

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