



5 June 2008

[text of letter sent to all Victorian MP's]

Parliament House
Melbourne VIC 3002

Dear,

As major providers of aged care services in Victoria we appeal to you to reject the Medical Treatment (Physician Assisted Dying) Bill 2008. The Bill permits a doctor, at the request of a patient, to prescribe a drug to intentionally end the life of a patient rather than caring for them or treating the illness.

The Bill will directly affect not only those who are dying, but also those who have an incurable illness which is causing intolerable suffering. The Bill defines 'intolerable suffering' as a 'profound suffering and/or distress, whether physical, psychological or existential...'. Such a definition is wide-ranging and subjective. It is also problematic in that pain and suffering of an 'existential nature' arises usually from loneliness and the lack of a sense of self worth, which responds to proper care and loving support.

When such broad definitions of suffering are combined with the fact that many chronic illnesses can be defined as 'incurable', the range of conditions that this legislation will encompass is very large indeed.

Rather than benefiting Victorians who suffer from chronic illnesses, the Bill would, in effect, make protection of their lives dependant on the strength of their will to continue. If assisted dying were an option, there would be pressure for all seriously ill people to consider it even if they would not otherwise have entertained such an idea. Patients might feel obliged to choose it for the wrong reasons, such as concern for their burden on others and the financial implications of chronic or terminal illness.

Serious illness and dying are times when a person needs the support of others. The concept of assisted dying puts at risk these important relationships of support and undermines a patient's ability to trust their carers and the health care systems responsible for their care. In this way, the Bill will also indirectly affect many others through their relationships as family members, friends and carers of those eligible for assisted dying.

We are most concerned how this legislation may jeopardise the fate of vulnerable individuals, generate considerable anxiety for elderly, disabled or very ill patients and cause detrimental effects on societal attitudes towards the sick and the dying.

For these reasons, we oppose this legislation.

Assisted dying is contrary to the principles of care and respect that we, as Catholic aged care providers, provide to ageing members of our community - members from diverse cultures, nationalities, faiths and walks of life.



Our care is provided with a commitment to the wellbeing of each of those whom we serve. This commitment requires that we never abandon the person for whom we undertake care. Human life is more than merely a physiological state. The experience of suffering, diminishment and death are not welcome but are accepted as part of the reality of the human condition. In Catholic aged care, the hallmark of our acceptance of the humanity and intrinsic dignity of each individual is our steadfast commitment to caring for all including the weakest and most vulnerable, especially in their final stages of life.

Thank you for considering this appeal on a matter that we consider fundamental to the wellbeing of our society. We would appreciate an indication of your position on this Bill.

Yours sincerely

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