

# BELVEDERE

## AGED CARE

### **Voluntary Assisted Dying Position Statement**

At Belvedere Aged Care, and in accordance with our mission, we are committed to:

- Promoting the rights of residents to exercise freedom of choice
- Respecting the privacy and dignity of our residents
- Acknowledging cultural and spiritual differences
- Providing holistic, high-quality care to our residents.

#### **Palliative Care**

Palliative care is an approach that improves the quality of life of patients and their families facing the problems associated with life-limiting illness, through the prevention and relief of suffering by means of early identification and impeccable assessment and treatment of pain and other problems, physical, psychosocial and spiritual. Reference: Palliative care Australia

The aim of palliative care is to prevent and relieve a person's suffering. It improves the quality of life of people with a life-limiting illness. A resident can receive palliative care at any stage of illness, and they can continue treatment for an illness while receiving palliative care or accessing VAD.

#### **End of Life Care**

End-of-life care is the care and services given to a person and their family when the person is dying and facing the end of their life. End-of-life care is an important part of palliative care and often involves bringing together a range of health professionals to help a person to live out their remaining time as comfortably as possible.

An aged care provider must meet a resident's needs for palliative care or end-of-life care irrespective of whether that person is considering or has been assessed as eligible to access VAD.

A person's decision to access VAD is different from advance care planning. Advance care planning enables a person to make some decisions about the health care they would or would not like to receive if they were to become seriously ill and unable to communicate preferences or make treatment decisions.

#### **Voluntary Assisted Dying (VAD)**

VAD is different from palliative care and end-of-life care. Voluntary Assisted Dying (VAD) is the administration of life-ending medication to prevent unnecessary suffering for a person at the end of their life, in line with the strict eligibility criteria, and processes set out in the relevant laws. VAD must be voluntary and sought by the person themselves.

Medications can be self-administered, or they can be administered by a suitably trained medical practitioner. Only those people who are already dying from an incurable, advanced and progressive disease, illness, or medical condition are able to access voluntary assisted dying. Advanced age, mental illness or disability alone do not make a person eligible.

VAD enables eligible adults who are in the end stages of a terminal illness and suffering intolerably, to end their suffering at a time and place of their choosing and with their loved ones, if they wish.

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### VAD Law

In 2017, Victoria became the first Australian state to legalise 'physician assisted' suicide or 'euthanasia' through the implementation of the *Voluntary Assisted Dying Act (the Act) 2017 (Vic)* in force from 19 June 2019. The Act provides for a competent individual over the age of 18 and who meets the strict criteria outlined in the Act, through engagement with a Medical Practitioner and Specialist Practitioner to be referred to the Voluntary Assisted Dying Review Board. The Board will then determine if the individual, meeting the criteria, will be provided access to a prescribed agent for the sole purpose of ending their life.

Only people who meet all the conditions and follow the process can access the voluntary assisted dying substance. A person's decision to ask for voluntary assisted dying must be:

- voluntary (the person's own decision)
- enduring (the person makes three separate requests for voluntary assisted dying during the process)
- fully informed (the person is well-informed about their disease, and their treatment and palliative care options).

People can ask for voluntary assisted dying if they meet all the following conditions:

1. They must have an advanced disease that will cause their death and that is:
  - likely to cause their death within six months (or within 12 months for neurodegenerative diseases like motor neurone disease)
  - causing the person suffering that is unacceptable to them.
2. They must have the ability to make and communicate a decision about voluntary assisted dying throughout the formal request process.
3. They must also:
  - be an adult 18 years or over
  - have been living in Victoria for at least 12 months
  - be an Australian citizen or permanent resident.

### Safeguards

There are strong safeguards to make sure a person is making their own decision to seek voluntary assisted dying, and that others are not pressuring them.

- Only the person deciding to seek voluntary assisted dying can ask for it. Their carer, family, friend or support person cannot ask for them.
- It is against the law for a medical or other health practitioner to suggest voluntary assisted dying as an end of life option to one of their patients. A medical practitioner cannot talk about voluntary assisted dying unless a person asks them about it first.
- As part of the process, 2 doctors must decide the person is well-informed about their disease, treatment and palliative care options and can make their own decision about voluntary assisted dying. Both medical practitioners must assess that no-one is forcing or influencing the person to request it. Both medical practitioners must have completed training in assessing a person for voluntary assisted dying.
- Medical practitioners must also remind the person they do not have to go ahead if they change their mind at any time throughout the process.

### Our position

At Belvedere Aged Care, we recognise that individuals and those important in their life face agonising challenges when dealing with terminal and debilitating illnesses, and we endeavour to provide

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holistic palliative and end-of-life care, inclusive of empathic pastoral support, to residents and the important people in their life during this difficult time. Equally, we support the values of an individual and their ability to exercise self-determination and their right to informed and autonomous decision-making. Therefore, in accordance with these values, and the Act, we will:

- Provide holistic, comprehensive palliative and end-of-life care and support, which meets the physical, spiritual, psychological, and social needs of the resident and those important in their life, with the goal of reducing suffering.
- Empower the resident to actively participate in all decision-making regarding their care and support and respect their self-determination using advance care planning, also recognising the role of substitute decision-makers/medical treatment decision-makers and any other agents acting on behalf of the resident.
- Assist residents to access their general Practitioner, with whom they may choose to discuss the VAD process.
- Ensure any resident who requests information about Voluntary Assisted Dying is provided information regarding this Position Statement and where to find more information outside of Belvedere Aged Care.
- Respect the privacy and confidentiality of a resident who chooses to access the VAD process

### Getting Support

The Statewide Care Navigator Service provides information and answers questions about voluntary assisted dying in Victoria. Care navigators are nurses and allied health professionals who can support a person, their carers, family and friends. For more information, see [Statewide Care Navigator Service](#)

### Support services

Some people find it upsetting to think about their, or a loved one's death and end of life care. If reading this information has raised issues of grief, stress or personal crisis, you may have a GP or other health practitioner who can discuss this with you.

The following services may also provide assistance:

- [Lifeline](#) (Tel: [13 11 14](#)) provides telephone or online support and counselling 24 hours a day, 7 days a week.
- [Grief Australia](#) (Tel: [1800 642 066](#)) provides a state wide specialist bereavement service (including counselling and support groups) for individuals, children and families.
- [Griefline](#) (Victoria Tel: [03 9935 7400](#)) is a free national helpline offering confidential telephone counselling 7 days a week, 365 days a year.

There are many other services available to provide counselling support listed on the [Beyond Blue website](#).

### References:

[ACQSC Voluntary Assisted Dying- factsheet- The role of Aged care providers](#)

[Department of Health Victoria Voluntary Assisted Dying](#)

[Older Persons Advocacy Network \(OPAN\)](#)