

Some Reasons Why Assisted Suicide & Euthanasia Should NOT be Legal

- People on both sides of the debate care about suffering people and want to prevent intolerable suffering. The key issue is the long-term consequences of a law change for public safety. This is an issue of social justice – protecting vulnerable people from pressure and abuse.
- These days no-one need die in pain. In the rare cases (1-4%) where pain medication is not enough, a person can be sedated. Persistent requests for euthanasia are not based on pain, but on non-physical reasons such as a desire to be in control, a fear of being a burden or feeling socially isolated. Death is not the right or best response to these issues.
- The desire to die by suicide, or assisted suicide, is usually associated with depression. Research shows that when terminally ill people who want to die receive treatment for depression, 98-99% change their minds to wanting to live.
- When seriously ill patients receive good palliative care (physical + psychological), they rarely want to end their lives.
- Good medical care aims to eliminate the pain, not kill the patient. Key medical bodies oppose a law change, e.g. The NZ Medical Association, Hospice NZ, the Australian and NZ Society of Palliative Medicine and Palliative Care Nurses NZ.
- The fact that voluntary euthanasia and assisted suicide (EAS) are illegal means maximum efforts are made to relieve pain and address all aspects of a person's suffering. Will this still occur if the law is changed? EAS would be a cheaper option.
- Legalising EAS, especially for irreversible and unbearable mental conditions, accepts that 'some suicides are OK'. This risks sending a 'mixed message' regarding the tragedy of youth suicide and creates a confusing double standard.
- The current law has a stern face, but a kind heart. By holding a penalty in reserve, it sends a strong message that it's not OK to deliberately kill someone else. However, the Court shows compassion in individual cases based on specific circumstances. For example, in 2012 Evans Mott was discharged without conviction for assisting his wife's suicide.
- Changing the law will not mean an end to such cases going to court as it could still be difficult to distinguish between an assisted suicide and a murder.
- Many assume that changing the law will simply allow the very small number of high-profile cases to proceed without legal objection. In fact, 'legalisation leads to normalisation' and, as has happened overseas, will lead to greatly increased numbers dying that way.
- Changing the law would create a legal situation in which the state licenses death in advance and sanctions the death of some of its citizens.
- Legal assisted suicide amounts to state-sanctioned suicide.
- Changing the law would send a message that some people's lives are not worth living – it will steer some people towards a premature death.
- Granting a tiny and vocal minority the choice to be killed will undermine the choice and/or will of many others to live.
- Allowing voluntary euthanasia and assisted suicide (EAS) opens the door for disabled, sick and elderly people to see themselves as a financial and emotional burden. The 'right to die' could become a 'duty to die'. No safeguards can protect against this. In Oregon, 40% of those receiving legal assisted suicide in 2014 cited "being a burden" as a reason.
- Abuse of the disabled and elderly is a serious issue in New Zealand. Legalising euthanasia would put them at further risk, especially when there is increasing pressure on the health budget.
- We should not ask doctors, who have a duty of care, to intentionally kill their patients using lethal drugs.
- Intentional killing is dangerous and opens the door to abuse. Legalising voluntary euthanasia paves the way for euthanasia without consent. Up to a third of Belgian euthanasia cases occur without consent.
- Safeguards will be unenforceable, because they rely on the agents involved to report the deaths as assisted suicide or euthanasia. There is no way of knowing whether a person followed all the legal requirements.
- It is neither possible nor rational to limit legal assisted suicide or voluntary euthanasia to particular groups of people or specific conditions. There would be the same erosion of boundaries here in New Zealand as has occurred overseas.
- New Zealand abolished the death penalty partly because of the danger of executing even one innocent person. Legalising EAS will inevitably lead to some people dying based on a wrong diagnosis or being killed when they don't want to die.

Recommended websites: suicideinquiry.nz, carealliance.org.nz, euthanasiadebate.org.nz, protect.org.nz

Or, free call 0800 4 AROHA (0800 42 76 42)