

## Some Reasons Why Assisted Suicide and Euthanasia Should NOT be Legal

- People on both sides 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. It's a social justice issue: protecting vulnerable people from pressure and abuse.
- These days no-one in NZ need to die in pain. In rare cases (1-4%) where pain medication is not enough, a person can be sedated (palliative sedation)[1]. 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, can be associated with treatable [depression](#).
- When seriously ill patients receive good palliative care (physical, psychological and spiritual), 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 [New Zealand Medical Association](#); [Hospice New Zealand](#); the [Australian and New Zealand Society of Palliative Medicine](#); [Palliative Care Nurses New Zealand](#), and the [New Zealand Health Professionals Alliance](#), among others.
- 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 assisted suicide, especially for unbearable mental conditions, accepts that 'some suicides are okay'. 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 okay to deliberately kill someone else or assist in their suicide. However, the Court shows compassion in individual cases based on specific circumstances. For example, in 2012 [Evans Mott was discharged without conviction](#) for assisting in his wife's suicide.
- A law change will not mean an end to cases going to court, as it could be difficult to distinguish between an assisted suicide and a murder.
- Many assume that changing the law will simply allow the small number of high-profile cases to proceed without legal objection. However, 'legalisation leads to normalisation' and, as evidenced overseas, will lead to greatly increased numbers dying that way.
- Changing the law would create a situation in which the state licenses death in advance and sanctions the death of some citizens.
- Legalising assisted suicide amounts to state-sanctioned suicide.
- Changing the law would send a message that some people's lives are not worth living and steer some towards 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](#), 49% of those receiving legal assisted suicide in 2016 cited "concern about being a burden" as a reason.[2]
- Abuse of disabled and elderly people is a serious issue in New Zealand. Legalising euthanasia would put them further at 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. According to a 2015 NEMJ study, 27% of euthanasia deaths in Flanders, Belgium, occurred without consent.[3]
- Safeguards are unenforceable, because they rely totally on the agents involved to report the death as assisted suicide or euthanasia. There is no way of knowing whether a person followed all the legal requirements. The only witness may be dead.
- 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 euthanasia will inevitably lead to some people dying based on a wrong diagnosis or being killed when they don't want to die.

### References

[1] Dunne, P. (2012, May 12). Euthanasia and the issue of pain [video file]. Retrieved from [https://www.youtube.com/watch?time\\_continue=4&v=MzcHt2QLnuA](https://www.youtube.com/watch?time_continue=4&v=MzcHt2QLnuA)

[2] Oregon Health Authority Public Health Division (2017, February 21). Oregon Death with Dignity Act Data Summary 2016. p.10.

[3] 1.7 / (6.3 - 0.05) = 27% Chamberaere, K., Van der Stichele, R., Mortier, F., Cohen, J., and Deliens, L. Recent Trends in Euthanasia and Other End-of-Life Practices in Belgium. *N Engl J Med*, 372;12, p.1179-81. doi: 10.1056/NEJMc1414527. Retrieved from <http://www.nejm.org/doi/pdf/10.1056/NEJMc1414527>