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**A plea to the ACT Legislative Assembly to pass a humane Voluntary Assisted Dying law that permits all people who are suffering intolerably, regardless of whether they are at the last stages of life, or likely to lose mental capacity, to choose a legal dignified death and not have to consider other means.**

The ACT's current Voluntary Assisted Dying (VAD) Bill requires a person to have a condition that is advanced, progressive and expected to cause death, to experience intolerable suffering, declining quality of life, and to be in the last stages of their life, *before* they can request access to VAD. This places great strain on some people and families who are already under great stress and suffering.

If, at any stage in the complex process to access VAD, a person loses decision-making capacity, they will then be denied access to VAD. This applies even if they have already been granted access to VAD. They will then continue to suffer until they die.

If you are concerned that you might experience a complete loss of mental capacity due to dementia, and would want VAD if this occurs, this Bill will not allow it. Other countries do provide ways this can happen and the ACT Human Rights Commission says those means should be considered.

There are health conditions that cause people to live with intolerable suffering for many years, even decades, before they become eligible to apply to obtain a peaceful death.

People with intolerable suffering due to conditions such as untreatable chronic pain, and severe depression that does not respond to treatment, are not eligible for VAD, as these conditions do not, of themselves, cause death.

Some conditions, such as motor neurone disease, will eventually cause death, but only after years or decades of dramatically reduced quality of life. Only in the very last stages of these conditions do people become eligible for VAD.

If a family member or close friend assists a person with intolerable suffering to end their life, they are exposing themselves to criminal charges.

Many people experiencing long-term suffering choose to suicide—two to five times more frequently than the community in general. Violent suicide traumatises first responders, family and friends.

The safety of vulnerable people can be protected. Over 20 years of overseas experience has shown that, with good clinical practice guidelines for special conditions, mechanisms to ensure adherence to the defined processes, and review of all for VAD approvals, vulnerable people can be protected from coercion.

*Please contact your Legislative Assembly members and let them know your views.*

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