

Voluntary Assisted Dying

A discussion paper
for Salvationists



The Salvation
Army Australia
Moral and Social
Issues Council





Let's talk
about...

Voluntary Assisted Dying

The intention of Discussion Papers for Salvationists is to present issues of importance in a way that stimulates thought and discussion. Many of the issues give rise to opposing points of view with people often thinking of issues as right or wrong, black or white. Discussion papers are not definitive in themselves but enable prayerful exploration by Salvationists and friends. Faith-based-facilitation is the ideal way for a group to work through this material but it can equally be used by individuals or other group processes.



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Context

Voluntary Assisted Dying (VAD), also referred to as euthanasia, or assisted suicide, is when medical intervention takes place, at the patient's request, in order to end the patient's life. Having being legalised for several decades in various international jurisdictions, we now find that VAD has recently been legalised in Australia. It is currently lawful and practiced in all Australian States.

- Victoria (Voluntary Assisted Dying Act 2017 VIC),
- Western Australia (Voluntary Assisted Dying Act 2019 WA)
- Tasmania (End-of-Life Choices (Voluntary Assisted Dying) Act 2021)
- South Australia (Voluntary Assisted Dying Act 2021 SA)
- Queensland Voluntary Assisted Dying Act 2021 (the Act)
- New South Wales Voluntary Assisted Dying Act 2022

VAD is illegal in the Northern Territory and the Australian Capital Territory. However, in October 2023, draft legislation to legalise VAD was introduced in the Australian Capital Territory parliament, and the Northern Territory Government is starting a community consultation process for developing a framework for VAD.



People deserve
compassion and care
in their suffering and
dying





The Issue

The Salvation Army has an International Positional Statement regarding VAD. The 'Statement of Position' outlines:

The Salvation Army believes strongly that all people deserve compassion and care in their suffering and dying. Euthanasia and assisted suicide should not, however, be considered acceptable responses. They undermine human dignity and are morally wrong. **"The Salvation Army believes therefore that euthanasia and assisted suicide should be illegal."**¹

Given the strong opposition The Salvation Army has towards the act of VAD, the issue arises as to how The Salvation Army might respond when the situation occurs of having someone in our care request legally provided for end of life services.

The Salvation Army in Australia currently has 20 Aged Care Facilities, 7 Retirement Villages, and provides respite and community care in the Aged Care Sector. With legalised VAD expanding across the nation, it is only a matter of time before one of our residents will request this service.

1. <https://www.salvationarmy.org.au/subscribe/sites/masic/files/IPS/Euthanasia%2Band%2Bassisted%2Bsuicide%2BIPS.pdf>

Responses to the issue

One possible option is to hold fast to our position, and argue legally and politically that The Salvation Army should not have to facilitate nor participate in something that 'goes against our beliefs' – that we should be given an exemption from allowing our residents access to legally provide for end-of-life services. Certainly some jurisdictions are exploring an exemption for faith-based facilities to register as 'conscientious objectors'.

This would be one path, but the danger of this route is that it could lead to incredibly cruel outcomes, lacking in Christian compassion and care.

The reality is that the legal and political debate on VAD is basically done here in Australia, and now is the time to examine how we can work within this new paradigm to see people cared for and loved by Jesus through The Salvation Army. A new framework of 'compassion' is required moving forward.

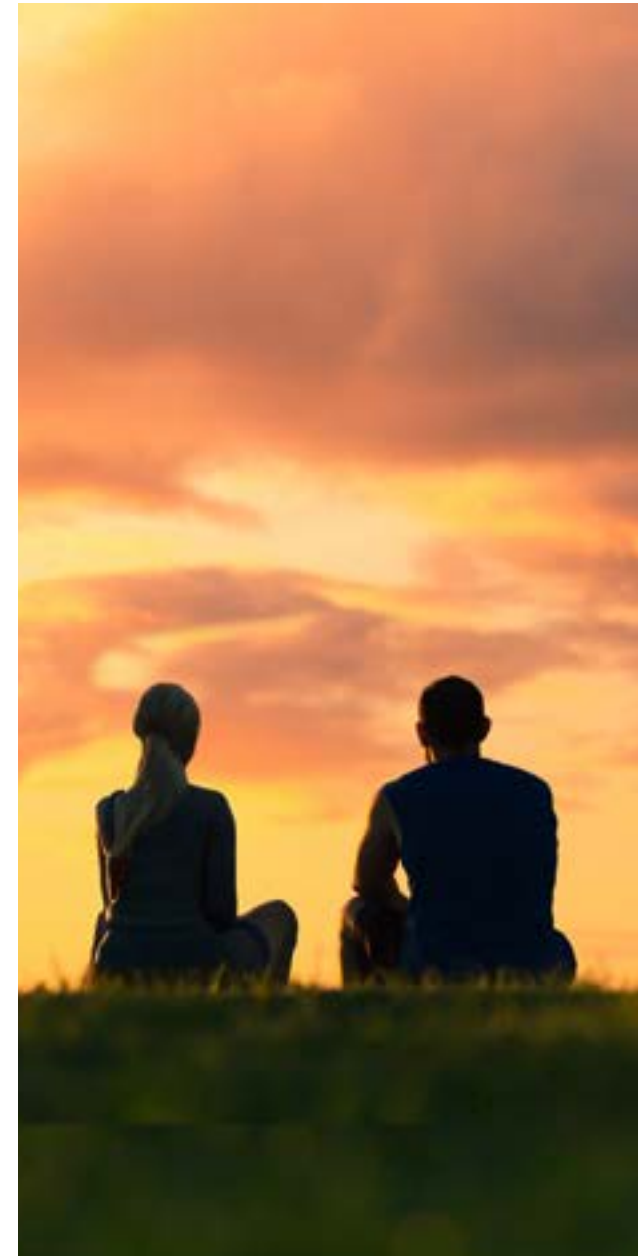
If we are truly committed to 'Caring for People', then we cannot reasonably ask an aged care resident to leave their 'home' if they wish to proceed with legally available end of life measures. If we truly are committed to 'Working

for Justice', then we cannot be party to the possibility of making someone homeless for seeking out a legally supported act (our Vision for The Salvation Army in Australia states we will work against 'hardship and injustice', yet this would literally be creating such a scenario of hardship and injustice).

It will come down to this choice for The Salvation Army here in Australia – allow someone to access the legally supported end of life procedures, or force them to move from an Army property in order to do so.

This has been a dilemma that other Salvation Army Territories have had to already consider. The position taken by the Netherlands Salvation Army takes the compassionate and just choice:

"When a client, in our long lasting care and support, perseveres in his/her wish for assisted dying, wishes to proceed within the strict protocol of the Dutch Euthanasia Legislation, we will not forsake our client. More than ever in these precarious situations between life and death, we want to be close to our people who often have nobody else and no other place to go to. No other place to die. In loving presence, in prayer, in their place they call home, we accompany them home to our Lord and Saviour."





We ourselves are not assisting in the dying (that is strictly regulated by law and in the hands of external doctors/specialists), but through our pastoral presence by officers and employees, we are in loving presence and prayer near to a person's final journey and promotion to glory, providing a dignified context. This continues to the funeral where we, as his/her only 'family', are quite often the only people present." (TSA Netherlands)

The position taken by the Netherlands Salvation Army seems to align with our Mission of 'Caring for People' and 'Working for Justice'. Further, 'Compassion' is one of our 'Values', as

is 'Integrity', and removing someone from their home because they wish to seek out legally supported end of life procedures, while championing 'compassion' feels disingenuous.

There will be Salvation Army staff, both Officers and Employees, uncomfortable in allowing VAD to occur on Army premises. The solution to this is that no-one be required to participate in any way during these procedures if they are uncomfortable in doing so. It is highly likely, as in the Netherlands, that the legislation would require medical professionals' involvement, and any participation from The Salvation Army would be pastoral.

We are in loving presence and prayer near to a person's final journey and promotion to glory

One can still object to euthanasia and assisted dying laws, and yet still work at a Salvation Army aged care facility. With clear guidelines in place, the two positions can co-exist.

Death is a frightening prospect for many. While we affirm that VAD is not the best pathway for our community, the Salvation Army should seek to be compassionate, pastoral, and guided by love as we support people and their families through what will undoubtedly be a difficult time.



*Compassionate, pastoral
and guided by love*



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Developed by



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