



**LEGISLATIVE ASSEMBLY**  
FOR THE AUSTRALIAN CAPITAL TERRITORY

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**SELECT COMMITTEE ON END OF LIFE CHOICES IN THE ACT**

Ms Bec Cody MLA (Chair), Mrs Vicki Dunne MLA (Deputy Chair), Ms Tara Cheyne MLA,  
Mrs Elizabeth Kikkert MLA, Ms Caroline Le Couteur MLA.

## Submission Cover Sheet

### End of Life Choices in the ACT

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# Select Committee on End of Life Choices in the ACT

## Submission from the ACT Humanist Society

This submission speaks to the Select Committee's second term of reference: "ACT community views on the desirability of voluntary assisted dying being legislated in the ACT;"

Humanists believe in treating all humans with compassion and respect, and giving them freedom of choice over the course of their own lives so long as their behaviour does not adversely impact others. Those are reasons enough for supporting assisted dying; in addition we would like to share the personal story of one of our members. These events happened some years ago in the ACT.

*"My mother developed emphysema and was suffering from chronic back pain. She made the decision to end her own life and began researching how to do it. She spent some months meticulously planning her death, discussing it frequently with me and my father. I found this distressing, and spoke to my doctor and hers to see if there was some way we could help her feel comfortable with her life. They could offer no solutions other than having her committed and placed on suicide watch. Her death from emphysema was not imminent enough for her to be placed in a hospice.*

*My mother asked me to obtain the book "Final Exit" for her. I did so, because I knew she was determined to end her life with or without it. If I had failed to support her, she would have died alone, feeling unloved.*

*She ended her life in the presence of myself and my father. The method she chose was uncomfortable for her and traumatic for us. She had left a note for her GP and asked us to contact him after she was gone. The note requested him to quietly record the cause of death as heart failure.*

*The doctor stood by the ethics of his profession and reported my mother's death as a suicide to the police. My father and I were taken to the station the same day and interrogated separately for some hours. My father's computer was seized as was my mother's address book. The police used the address book to contact my mother's friends and questioned them. Mum had been concerned about the stigma of suicide and wanted my father and I to tell no-one what she had done.*

*Dad and I lived under the shadow of prosecution until our case came before the coroner two years later. We were both open and honest about what we had done and why. I was prepared to go to prison for it. Thankfully, the coroner ruled that although I had a case to answer for when I obtained the "Final Exit" book, it would not be in the public interest to prosecute me.*

*I supported my mum when she ended her life because anything else would have been a betrayal. She would have died anyway, feeling unloved and alone."*

So long as assisted dying is illegal, every year there are families who have to make those same decisions. People end their lives by whatever means they have at hand, with or without the support of their families. Family members have to decide whether to betray their loved ones or face up to 10 years in prison.

Humanism is based on compassion and respect for the dignity of all human beings. It is part of showing respect and compassion for people to support them in making decisions about crucial aspects of their own lives, including the circumstances of their own death.

The ACT Humanist Society asks the inquiry to report in favour of working towards legalising assisted dying in the ACT.

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Mary-Anne Cosgrove  
Convenor  
ACT Humanist Society

  
vatt ACT 2617

