



LEGISLATIVE ASSEMBLY
FOR THE AUSTRALIAN CAPITAL TERRITORY

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

Submission Number: 136

Date Authorised for Publication: 29/3/18

To the Committee Secretary

Select Committee – Inquiry in to End of Life Choices in the ACT

I wish to submit the following submission to the upcoming inquiry with my details as follows:

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(Should my submission be accepted I would request that my personal details be kept confidential due to the sensitive nature of my father's illness and health journey)

In response to the inquiry terms of reference – points 1 & 6:

I find 'the conversation about end of life' in generally lagging in the ACT health sphere... and is yet to be had on a wider scale. Sadly, the conversation in my experience as a clinical nurse - is currently often had in a health crisis (e.g acute presentation/deterioration resulting in Emergency Dept presentation) - with unnecessary added stress to all involved.

The ACT Health "Respecting Choices" program has made some headway in the acute setting ... but the conversation needs to begin in individual's homes and with primary healthcare givers including the GP....and continue on in the individual's health journey.

Palliative Care Australia recently noted that there is ONE Palliative Medicine Specialist for EVERY 704 deaths each year (Canberra Times Jan 09 2018 - 'Not the way they wanted to die: Final wishes of thousands of Australians go unmet') resulting in a difficult end of life journey for many.

My own father is currently on his own 'end of life journey'. This path has highlighted the limited and overstretched ACT Palliative care services - both acute and community based. Our father's inpatient referral for a Palliative care medical review in late 2017 was sadly unmet and there was a delay in commencing Home Based Palliative Care services due to overwhelming workloads. Palliative care needs to be a local and national health priority – as dying is a part of all our life journey's.

Nicole Hasham (Canberra Times reporter) summarised the end of life scenario well - 'final wishes of thousands of Australians go unmet'. At this point in our current day health system - I believe our highest priority should be on the provision of palliative care services - in the setting most suitable and desirable for the individual (home, aged care facility, hospice). Palliative Care Australia's Liz Callaghan rightly shares the thought that "four out of every five dying people could benefit from palliative care".

Introducing a voluntary assisted dying scheme without a major overhaul of our palliative care services would address only a small area of 'end of life' issues.... Palliative Care service focus is what is desperately needed now - not tomorrow.