



LEGISLATIVE ASSEMBLY
FOR THE AUSTRALIAN CAPITAL TERRITORY

SELECT COMMITTEE ON END OF LIFE CHOICES IN THE ACT

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Submission Cover Sheet

End of Life Choices in the ACT

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From: Agnes Walker
To: [LA Committee - EOLC](#)
Subject: Submission to End of Life Choices Inquiry
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Submission by:

Dr Agnes Walker

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23 March 2018, 8 am

Dear Inquiry members,

My submission briefly concerns the following terms of reference:

- 2 *ACT community views on the desirability of voluntary assisted dying being legislated in the ACT;*
- 3 *risks to individuals and the community associated with voluntary assisted dying and whether and how these can be managed;*
- 4 *the applicability of voluntary assisted dying schemes operating in other jurisdictions to the ACT, particularly the Victorian scheme;*
- 5 *the impact of Federal legislation on the ACT determining its own policy on voluntary assisted dying and the process for achieving change*

For several decades now I have been a strong supporter of 'voluntary assisted dying'. I firmly believe that every person should have the right to *choose how they die themselves*. I cannot find any logical reason in support of the current Australian situation whereby a few federal politicians with catholic backgrounds can block ACT residents from choosing a 'voluntary assisted dying' option similar to what has proved to work - and been generally accepted - in several other countries.

My catholic mother, who died in 2010 at age 97, fully enjoyed life until she became too frail at age 95. Although she never had any diagnosable health-threatening illness, after one of her 'falls' at age 95 she needed a minor operation on her slightly fractured hip. By then she was too frail to be able to recover as a younger person would. On her return from hospital incontinence became a problem. She felt very ashamed of that and soon decided to enter the nursing home of a (Hungarian initiated) catholic retirement village near ██████████ (Sydney) where she previously had a villa for a decade or so.

To prevent another fall, in the nursing home she was only allowed to walk with a staff member and her frailness quickly increased. Soon her food started to occasionally go into her respiratory system. As choking could follow, the nursing home wanted to send her back to hospital. My mother said her previous hospital experience was terrible and she would much rather die than return there. She begged me to help her to end her life. So I met with nursing home staff and reminded them that, while my mother lived in her villa at the village, she had signed a 'living will' every 2 years stating that if medical intervention could not get her back to an acceptable health state than she would choose to refuse treatment.

Because in her several 'living wills' my mother consistently stated the same wishes, the nursing staff eventually agreed not to send her back to hospital. It was decided to keep her in the nursing home and only give her food in liquid form. She was happy with that and kept losing weight until she peacefully died a few months later.

My guess is that, with her catholic background, my mother would not have chosen 'voluntary assisted dying' had it been available in NSW at that time. However my English mother in law, who died at about the same age and time, did strongly request some form of assisted dying. When she was refused that by the British medical system, she let her family know that she had started to starve herself to death ... and did die peacefully a few months later.

Personally, I worked till age 72, at ANU lastly. Now, at age 76 I continue to volunteer in many interesting roles in Canberra and still fully enjoy life with family/friends/social groups. *My fervent hope is that, when my time to comes, the much appreciated efforts of Canberra people like yourselves would have resulted in me having the choice of 'voluntary assisted dying', should I qualify.*

Wishing your Inquiry all the best,

Agnes