

Finding support to seek voluntary assisted dying

Information for consumers and caregivers

Our research has shown that some people who want voluntary assisted dying (VAD) have found it difficult to find someone in the VAD system who can help. Some people may not even know VAD may be an option for them. This brochure explains how to deal with some of these barriers.

What is voluntary assisted dying (VAD)?

VAD is when a terminally ill person requests medication that will end their life. Two doctors must confirm the person meets the law's strict eligibility criteria. More information about VAD, including your state's eligibility criteria, is here: <https://end-of-life.qut.edu.au/assisteddying>.

I don't know if I am eligible for VAD

A person may not know that their illness could qualify them for VAD. Sometimes people think that VAD is only for people with cancer. But VAD is available for other illnesses that will cause death, such as neurological conditions (like Motor Neurone Disease) and advanced heart, lung, liver and kidney disease.

A person may not know they might be eligible for VAD because they don't know how long they are expected to live. Australian laws only allow VAD for a person who is expected to die within 6 months (or 12 months for neurodegenerative conditions). Queensland law is 12 months for all illnesses.



You may need to be direct and ask your doctor about whether you are eligible for VAD. This includes asking about how long you are expected to live as this is part of the eligibility criteria. You can also get a second opinion from another doctor about your eligibility for VAD. If you do decide you want the option of VAD, you should start these conversations early as the approval process can take some time.

I don't know who to contact about VAD

There are three main contact points:

1. **A VAD trained doctor** willing to assess eligibility for VAD. You can ask your GP or your specialist if they will help.



If your doctor says no, you can ask them to refer you to a doctor who can help, or for the contact details of VAD Care Navigators (see below). In some states, the VAD laws require doctors to do this.

2. **A VAD Care Navigator.** These are government-funded health professionals whose role is to help patients navigate the VAD system. They can give you or your family information about VAD and help connect you to a doctor who can assess your eligibility.



You can find your local Department of Health VAD website and VAD Care Navigator contact details here: <https://end-of-life.qut.edu.au/assisteddying> (see "Voluntary assisted dying contacts in your State").

3. **A local VAD Coordinator.** Some hospitals or health services have appointed a local VAD Coordinator who can help you, like a VAD Care Navigator.



You can ask your hospital, health service or other care facility if they have a VAD Coordinator who can help you find out more about VAD.

I am not sure how to talk about VAD with my doctor

Talking about VAD can be difficult. Research shows that some doctors find these discussions hard too. If you live in Victoria and South Australia, your doctor is not allowed to raise the topic of VAD first – you must ask your doctor about VAD.



If you want to discuss VAD with your doctor, be clear and direct. Use the words “voluntary assisted dying” so your doctor knows exactly what you mean. For example: “I want to know more about voluntary assisted dying. Could you talk to me about this please.” It might help to write out what you want to say before the appointment.

I am in a hospital, palliative care unit or residential aged care facility that objects to VAD

Although some facilities object to VAD, you can still seek VAD. Queensland, NSW and South Australia have laws which help people seek VAD even if they are in a facility which does not agree with it. More information about these laws is here: <https://end-of-life.qut.edu.au/assisteddying>.



You can ask the staff in your facility whether you can access VAD there. If the answer is no and this is stopping you from seeking VAD, or if you are uncomfortable about asking, contact the VAD Care Navigators.

If you want more information about VAD

If you want more information about VAD, you can visit End of Life Law in Australia’s VAD page: <https://end-of-life.qut.edu.au/assisteddying>. Information or support is also available from Go Gentle Australia <https://www.gogentleaustralia.org.au/> or your state’s Dying with Dignity organisation:

- **NSW:** <https://www.dwdnsw.org.au/>
- **Queensland:** <https://www.dwdq.org.au/>
- **SA:** <https://www.vadsa.org.au/>
- **Tasmania:** <https://www.dwdtas.org.au/>
- **Victoria:** <https://www.dwdv.org.au/>
- **WA:** <https://www.dwdwa.org.au/>

Supported by research and consumer experience

We thank the 32 family caregivers and one patient who participated in our research to share their experience of seeking VAD. This brochure was informed by their voices. You can access the research article here: <https://doi.org/10.1111/hex.13867>, and a short summary “Voluntary assisted dying is legal – but some people are unsure how to access it” here: <https://research.qut.edu.au/voluntary-assisted-dying-regulation/impact/>. We also acknowledge the helpful feedback on this brochure from consumers, health professionals and patient support organisations.

This brochure is based on Ben P White, Ruthie Jeanneret and Lindy Willmott, “Barriers to connecting with the voluntary assisted dying system in Victoria, Australia: A qualitative mixed method study” *Health Expectations* (2023) (early online): <https://doi.org/10.1111/hex.13867>.

This research was funded by the Australian Research Council Future Fellowship project “Enhancing End-of-Life Decision-Making: Optimal Regulation of Voluntary Assisted Dying” (FT190100410). For more information about this project, including other publications: <https://research.qut.edu.au/voluntary-assisted-dying-regulation/>

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