

## President's Report

It was not long ago that we sent out our last newsletter, but in the intervening time there has been much happening in the DWDV world.

The Voluntary Assisted Dying Review Board Annual Report, July 2023 to June 2024, was released and provided a thorough and comprehensive account of details on VAD in Victoria over the past year. We would like to congratulate those individuals who have been recently appointed to the Review Board, farewell those who have left the Board and of course acknowledge those that remain for another term to continue their wonderful work.

Nick Carr and I have just returned from the 'World Federation of Right to Die Societies' biennial conference in Dun Laoghaire, Ireland. It was well attended by delegates from all over the world and it was, as always, so interesting to hear news from other countries and catch up with old friends. Both Nick and I were invited to speak. I have included a brief summary on the conference events and there are more details on our website.

Sadly, we have seen the departure of three of our Board Members. Dr Lyn Stavretis decided to leave for personal reasons. Lyn did some amazing work for us on the issue of dementia and VAD and represented Victoria in a National subcommittee that looked intently at this issue. We congratulate Dr Peter Lange on his appointment to the Victorian Voluntary Assisted Dying Review Board, which has necessitated his departure from the DWDV Board. Marina Harris has unfortunately moved interstate but would be welcomed back in the blink of an eye should she return to Victoria. We thank them all for their valuable input in helping us to achieve so much over the last couple of years.

We are delighted to welcome new Board member, Danielle Jacobs.

As you will read, Danielle brings a wealth of experience to the Board in her various roles as a Senior Psychologist. Danielle will take over the role of organising and delivering our public end-of-life presentations and has already achieved so much in her short time with us. Danielle has brought with her two very different DWDV Ambassadors whom we very warmly welcome - Olly and Mia, our canine ambassadors!



*Jane Morris*

We are also very pleased to announce that DWDV and Griefline have agreed to work in collaboration for another year, providing support groups to those who have accompanied a loved one through the VAD process. Thank you to the wonderful Griefline staff who, along with DWDV's Jane Nosworthy and Nicole Grundy, provide the groups with their valuable VAD lived experience and knowledge.

Our Young Ambassadors never cease to amaze us with the work they do. We will provide more details of their achievements in the next Newsletter. The Young Ambassador program was the subject of my presentation in Dublin and I was overwhelmed with the response to this initiative of ours. The enthusiasm expressed for the group was so great that we are now discussing, with the WFRtDS, the creation of a global group in which representatives will be nominated from countries that have expressed interest in joining. Stay tuned!

Thank you to our amazing Board Members who are going above and beyond with their involvement in our numerous projects. And as always, a special thanks to our GM, Nat, Social Media expert Tiffany, Sue J and our wonderful members and supporters.

# Voluntary Assisted Dying Review Board Annual Report: July 2023 to June 2024

Recently, the Voluntary Assisted Dying Review Board released its annual report, covering July 2023 to June 2024. The full version may be found here:

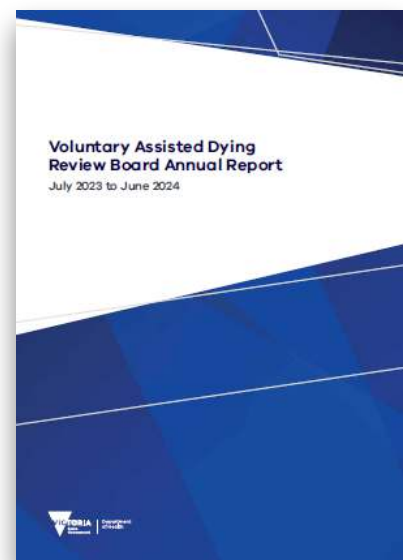
<https://www.health.vic.gov.au/voluntary-assisted-dying/voluntary-assisted-dying-review-board>.

In its Foreword, the report notes “Based on the experience of the first five years, the Board is satisfied that the objective of safety has been achieved through the Voluntary Assisted Dying Act 2017. However, there are opportunities to enhance the extent to which the goal of providing compassionate care is realised.”

The report continues its past practice of providing useful commentary and statistics. Of particular note are the commentary on the nature of the 5-year review, and thoughts for useful changes to legislation.

The report does refer (only) to the *operation* of the Act. However it notes:

- “The provision of compassionate end of life care... involves person-centred treatment, the promotion of personal autonomy, and an absence of unreasonable or preventable barriers to timely access. The Board considers that these elements can be advanced by adopting some procedural changes in the administration of the Voluntary Assisted Dying Act 2017 – without diminishing the provisions that have ensured the safe operation of the voluntary assisted dying program to date.”
- “Voluntary assisted dying deaths represented 0.84% of all deaths in Victoria. ... This is significantly lower than the percentage of voluntary assisted dying deaths in most other States.”
- “While those living in rural and regional Victoria can face greater difficulty in accessing voluntary assisted dying, especially given the ban on the use of telehealth, it is notable that while comprising 22% of the Victoria population, rural applicants make up 36% of voluntary assisted dying applicants.”
- “We are concerned about the ongoing sustainability of the program given that the data shows there are only seven medical practitioners trained to provide voluntary assisted dying per 100,000 adults in Victoria.”
- Both The Statewide Care Navigator Service and Statewide Pharmacy Service were again acknowledged for their excellent work.
- Compliance:  
“Between 1 July 2023 and 30 June 2024, the Board found 10 cases to be non-compliant with the Act.”  
Three cases were due to a delay in the return of the unadministered substance, one was an error in witnessing the Contact Appointment Form, and the remainder related to the late submission of certain forms. None of these late submissions of forms gave rise to an issue regarding the applicant’s eligibility or risk to the applicant or any other person.
- Areas for improvement:  
The Board notes the impact of the Commonwealth Criminal Code, in making it an offence to use an electronic carriage service such as a telephone or the internet to access, transmit, publish or make available material that counsels or incites suicide. (The offences do not differentiate voluntary assisted dying from suicide.) This is particularly an issue for those living in remote areas. Some doctors claim they cannot do the work required without breaking this law.



# VADRB ANNUAL REPORT (CONT)

Other problems noted include:

- The ban on medical practitioners instigating discussion on voluntary assisted dying when discussing end-of-life care;
- Delay in providing the permit for practitioner administration;
- The definition of an Australian ‘permanent resident’, which has been interpreted to mean ‘in possession of a permanent resident visa’;
- The required period of ‘resident in Victoria for 12 months’ (surely now less important, when residents of all Australian States have access to VAD);
- The requirement for a third medical opinion in neurodegenerative conditions with a prognosis of between six and 12 months; and
- The qualification requirements for the co-ordinating and consulting practitioners.

The Report also gives details on the frequency of access to VAD, and usage characteristics. For example - Voluntary Assisted Dying applications.

After a person makes a first request to access voluntary assisted dying, the co-ordinating medical practitioner lodges an application through the voluntary assisted dying Portal.

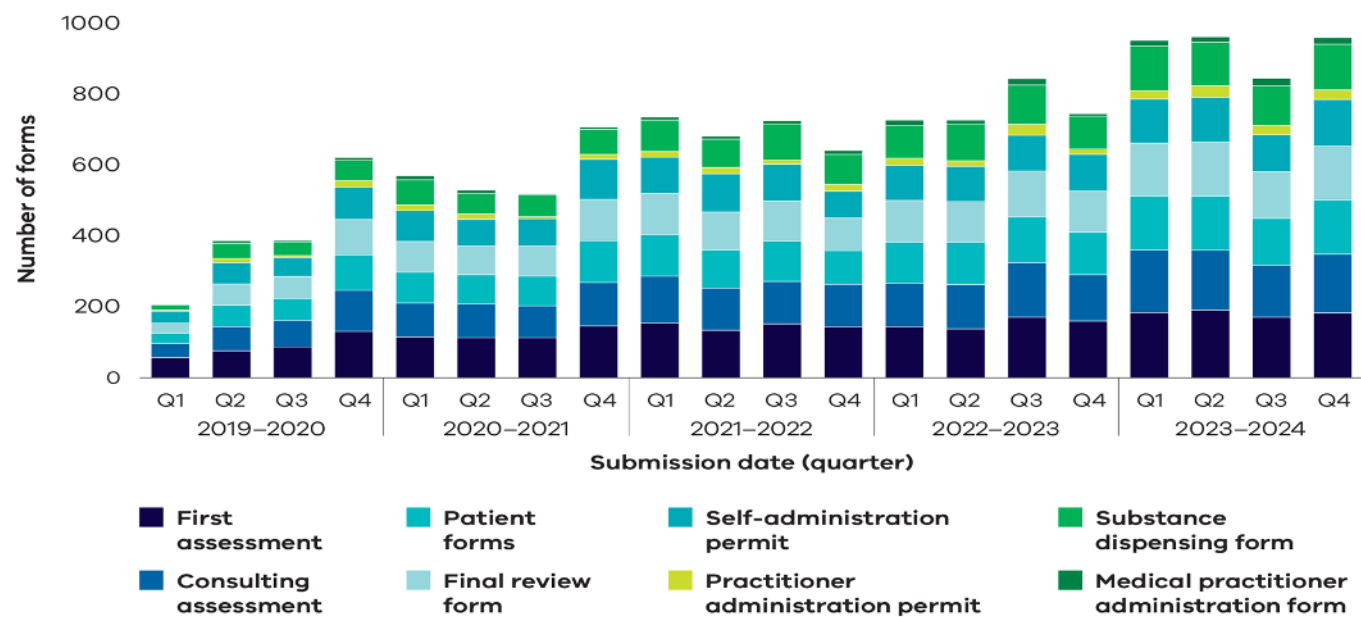
The graph below, from the report, represents the total number of forms submitted to the Portal as part of the application process, since the commencement of the legislation.

From 1 July 2023 to 30 June 2024, 597 permits for VAD medication were issued (486 for self-administration, 111 practitioner administration). The substance was dispensed 561 times.

For the same period, 301 deaths occurred by self-administration, and 70 by practitioner administration. Since the implementation of the Act in June 2019, 1282 Victorians have died from administration of the Voluntary Assisted Dying substance.

Whilst access to VAD is sometimes adversely impacted in various ways, it seems that information is slowly becoming more widespread, and that community nervousness about the process is reducing.

## Applications over time (forms submitted by quarter)





# Ollie and Mia - our first Canine Ambassadors!

We are delighted to announce the launch of our first Canine Ambassadors, Ollie and Mia. These extraordinary rescue dogs are set to transform how we approach conversations about death and dying.

Ollie (Irish Wolfhound cross) and Mia (Deerhound cross) have both overcome difficult beginnings to become symbols of compassion and connection.

Despite their youth, they bring a wealth of experience in providing comfort and support, particularly in the context of palliative care and end-of-life planning.

Their involvement aims to make discussions about these sensitive topics more accessible and less intimidating for people of all ages and circumstances.



## Enhancing Quality of Life Through the Human-Animal Bond

The human-animal bond is a powerful force, deeply impacting our quality of life. The unconditional care, attention, and calm demeanour of dogs can uplift spirits, reduce stress, and foster a sense of belonging and love. This bond is especially valuable for those who are stressed, anxious, or facing difficult circumstances.

Research has shown that the presence of a dog can significantly enhance overall health and well-being, providing a calming influence that makes challenging conversations more manageable.

For many, discussions about death and dying remain taboo or extremely difficult. Some people are eager to engage in such conversations but struggle to find a supportive listener, often internalising their thoughts. Ollie and Mia are here to bridge that gap.



## Ollie and Mia's Role in Our Mission

As DWDV's Canine Ambassadors, Ollie and Mia will be featured in a range of initiatives, including public events, community outreach programs, and social media campaigns.



Ollie

Their role is to highlight the importance of unconditional empathy and emotional support - and for many provide the warmth and comfort of the human-animal bond in vital end-of-life discussions.

DWDV is dedicated to advancing compassionate end-of-life choices and providing support for individuals and families.

The addition of Ollie and Mia represents an exciting development in our mission to empower people to make decisions that align with their values and to promote dignity, respect, and compassion in all aspects of end-of-life care.



Mia

For more information about our Canine Ambassadors, please contact Danielle Jacobs at [presentations@dwdv.org.au](mailto:presentations@dwdv.org.au) or on 0413 604 224.

# New Board Member Danielle Jacobs

Professionally, I've built my career as a senior psychologist, speaker, coach, and consultant in the fields of wellbeing and leadership, working with individuals, teams, and organisations locally and internationally. However, it was the devastating experience of supporting an incredible young friend with acute myeloid leukaemia that truly galvanised my drive to personally contribute to ensuring a better life and death for others.

Watching my friend—a new mother—suffer through agonising pain and fear, compounded by what I regard as inhumane hospital care, was intolerable. Her unnecessary distress and suffering, along with the helplessness felt by her family and me, ignited a fierce resolve in me. Since the passing of my dear friend, unfortunately, I've witnessed many similar heartbreaking situations firsthand.

Through my volunteer work in palliative care and as a VAD witness, alongside my two Delta Therapy Dogs, I have seen the very best in humane and loving end-of-life care. Yet, we still have a long way to go. Access to end-of-life options must be equitable, and people, especially during their most vulnerable moments, should never have to fight for care that aligns with their needs, values or preferences.

Every individual should have full control over their end-of-life choices. Every person deserves the right to have their wishes respected and to die a peaceful death free from unnecessary suffering. This includes people with dementia, who are currently excluded from access to Voluntary Assisted Dying (VAD).

While there is no single fix to this complex issue, improving community end-of-life choices understanding, respecting every individual's end-of-life wishes, and ensuring equitable access to VAD are crucial steps. If we want to be considered a humane society, we owe it to everyone to ensure their end-of-life journey is free from unnecessary suffering and that they are supported by their loved ones and care givers in the way they choose.

I feel absolutely privileged to be able to support Dying With Dignity Victoria in the pursuit of this essential outcome as a Board member.



*Danielle Jacobs*

## Congratulations Eve Crotty!



Our Young Ambassadors continue to amaze us. 'Raise Our Voice' is an initiative of the Federal Parliament that mobilises young women and gender diverse people through education, campaigns and community to transform policy and politics. 'Youth Voice' in Parliament is part of this program and occurred this year from 7-10 October 2024. It involved more than 90 politicians across Australia who dedicated a speaking slot to a 90-second speech written by a young person aged 25 or under from their electorate.

We were so excited and proud to learn that the speech written by one of our Young Ambassadors, Eve Crotty, was chosen to be read out by Dr Monique Ryan, House of Representatives. Eve described her mother's Voluntary Assisted Dying journey. Congratulations Eve!

After completing Eve's speech Monique said "I thank Eve so much for her courage and her generosity in sharing her mum's story. Much does need to be done to improve end-of-life care in this country and I commit to working on this for as long as I remain in this house."

Read Eve's speech under News on our website.



*Eve Crotty*

# Dementia Prevention Tips

by Dr Nick Carr

Dementia is the leading cause of death of older Australians, the two commonest forms being Alzheimer's disease and vascular dementia. I don't have to tell readers of this Newsletter how much this prospect haunts some of us. So, let's focus on the positive. We can't change our genetics (yet), but we do know that there are multiple things we can do to reduce our risk of dementia, so I've summarised the main ones here:

## 1. Everything that's good for the heart is good for the brain, so:

- **Quit smoking.** And yes, there will be a few of you out there still slipping out for a secret ciggie. If not yourselves, then maybe friends or relatives. How to quit? Talk to your GP, call the Quitline – a real human person will answer the phone, and they can really help. Quitline's number: 13 78 48
- **Minimise alcohol and any illicit drugs.** Sadly the days when we thought a bit of red wine was good for you are long gone. It's not that the occasional glass will fry your grey matter, just that nil is known to be good. One word – Sodastream.
- **Exercise, then more exercise, then some more.** Anything is good, more is better, pushing yourself hard some of the time (anaerobic exercise) adds extra benefit to heart and brain. For those who are very sedentary, don't despair; the greatest benefit is found in those who go from doing no exercise at all to doing at least something.
- **Keep weight, blood pressure, sugar and cholesterol under control.** The very best way to do this is through lifestyle, but sometimes medication is needed. Your GP again.

## 2. Stay socially connected.

- Isolation is not good for the brain. Try walking with a friend – exercise + connection. U3A anyone?

## 3. Do things that are uncomfortable and so make the brain work harder, such as:

- Use your non-dominant hand for things like carrying shopping, then maybe to brush your teeth, shave, use a mouse. Not easy? That's the point.
- Learn new skills. Juggling is hard, but you can learn – and it's making both sides of your brain work. Do Sudoku and crosswords, learn an instrument or to dance – or both. Learn another language. Learn a poem and recite it to your partner – from the heart.
- Use everyday opportunities to make your brain work. Got an SMS code sent to your phone? Read it,

remember it and then enter it. Write a shopping list, then memorise it (take the written version just in case – the soufflé won't rise if you forget the flour).



Here's a link to a fun segment about this:

[https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=FE2\\_yimmkCA](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=FE2_yimmkCA)

## 4. Difficulties with vision and hearing are now known to be a risk for dementia.

- Although we're not certain that correcting these can reduce the risk, it makes sense to ensure these are optimised. So, if hearing aids or spectacles are needed, they should be used regularly. If nothing else, this will help prevent disconnection from the world (see dot point 2 above).

## 5. Protect your brain from trauma.

- Severe head trauma has been proven to be a risk factor for dementia, recurrent concussions and more minor injuries almost certainly are too. Your boxing career may be over, so too late to turn back that clock, but wear a helmet when riding and resolve disputes with patience, not pugilism.

## 6. Depression increases the risk

- Treatment has been shown to help mitigate this risk. But depression is miserable and should be amenable to help, reducing dementia risk is just a longer-term benefit.

Lots of other factors may also be important. Air pollution is a risk factor (don't move to Beijing), and sleep disorders probably are too. Do brain-training apps help? There's no proof, people tend just to get better at the app, but if they're fun, go ahead. Dementia Australia has an interesting one that also tracks your progress (or decline) over time: <https://www.dementia.org.au/braintrack>

Our brains are like our muscles. Keep them working and flexible, and they grow stronger and more resilient. So I'll see you down the gym – and I'll have my specs on.



# WFRtDS Conference 2024, Dublin, Ireland.

## 20-21 September 2024.

by Jane Morris

Nick Carr and I have returned from the World Federation of Right to Die Societies (WFRtDS) conference, held in Dun Laoghaire, Dublin. I have written a summary of this wonderful experience for our website.

To read the full article, look for “WFRtDS Conference – Dublin 2024” under Resources in the top menu of our site. There you can also listen to an 8 minute video compilation of brief comments I was able to record from some of the presenters.

Read the article to learn about:

- ❑ The WFRtDS General Assembly that was held the day before the conference commenced, and current members of the new WFRtDS committee, including Secretary Anne Bunning from Australia!
- ❑ The number of current and new ‘Right to Die Societies’ that exist around the world, that are members of WFRtDS.
- ❑ A pre-conference workshop involving Australian Palliative Care Physician Greg Mewett, and Canadian MAID provider Dr Stefanie Green.
- ❑ The topics that most frequently arose and initiated the most discussion during the conference.
- ❑ Several key takeaways that stood out for me.
- ❑ A discussion between Dr Nick Carr and Irish physician Dr Brendan O’Shea, entitled ‘Safeguards: Designed to protect without impeding Patient Access’.
- ❑ My presentation, *Ageless Advocacy*, referring to the creation of our Young Ambassador group.

Visit our website for more details about all the above and to watch the video!

## Personal Stories and Grief Through Art

Have you visited the Personal Stories section of our website recently? If not, you may like to catch up on the more recent ones from Louise and John.

You can also find our *Grief Through Art Gallery* under Personal Stories in our top site menu. We are keen to add to our gallery with more examples - though you can already enjoy two we have gathered so far.

And if you have a story or a piece of artwork you'd like to share, we'd love to hear from you! You can find submission forms for both on our website.



*Dr Nick Carr & Jane Morris*



# Are you missing our news roundup?

If you are wondering what's happened to our usual summary of latest news from Australia and around the globe, which is collated for each issue by our amazing Jane Morris, don't worry! It will be back for our December issue. All our Board members have been incredibly busy with lots of projects and activities these last few months, not the least of which has included Jane and Nick forging wonderful global connections (and gaining recognition for DWDV!) at the WFRtDS conference. And John Lennon certainly had a point when he said "Life is what happens to you while you are busy making other plans"!



## DWDV Board



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*Jane Morris*



**SECRETARY**

*Jane Nosworthy*



**TREASURER**

*Hugh Sarjeant*

## BOARD MEMBERS



*Dr Nick Carr*



*Danielle Clarke*



*Michelle Hindson*



*Danielle Jacobs*

## DWDV ANNUAL GENERAL MEETING 2024

Saturday 9 November, 2:00pm - 4:00pm  
Kew Library  
Corner Cotham Road and Civic Drive  
Kew VIC 3101

**TO REGISTER OR SEND AN APOLOGY:**

**USE THIS QR CODE OR GO TO THE LINK ON OUR WEBSITE HOME PAGE**



**Email:** [dwdv@dwdv.org.au](mailto:dwdv@dwdv.org.au)

**Phone:** 0491 718 632

**Address:** PO Box 22, Camberwell, VIC 3124