

Health service participation in voluntary assisted dying

Health services should be considering the extent of their participation in voluntary assisted dying

- A health service may determine whether or not they participate in voluntary assisted dying.
- This decision will depend on whether they have staff with appropriate skills and expertise, whether they have the capacity to provide the service, and whether participation aligns with the values of the health service.
- Regardless of whether a health service will provide voluntary assisted dying, they should develop policies and procedures for when a patient requests voluntary assisted dying or requests information about voluntary assisted dying.

What do health services need to consider if they are thinking about providing voluntary assisted dying?

- To access voluntary assisted dying a person must complete the request and assessment process. This process requires them to be assessed as eligible by two doctors who hold either a fellowship with a specialist medical college or is a vocationally registered general practitioner. Specific voluntary assisted dying training for medical practitioners is being developed and will be available prior to the commencement of the Act.
- Health services should consider how they can facilitate this process and support patients and their families through the process.
- Health services should consider whether they can provide or facilitate access to doctors who hold appropriate qualifications and training.
- Health services should also consider the views of their staff and whether staff are willing to participate in voluntary assisted dying and whether they have appropriate skills and expertise.
- Health services should also consider how it will support staff if it decides to provide voluntary assisted dying.

What happens if a health service decides not to provide voluntary assisted dying?

- The health service should determine how it will respond to requests for voluntary assisted dying or requests for information.
- The health service is under no obligation to refer the patient to someone who will assist them, but should not inhibit a person's access to treatment. The health service should inform the patient as soon as practicable that they will not assist them.
- The health service should also consider how it will support staff and patients in having these conversations.

Will health services be supported if they provide voluntary assisted dying?

- Yes. The implementation of voluntary assisted dying is being supported by an Implementation Taskforce. The Taskforce and the Department of Health and Human Services are developing a range of materials to support health services and health practitioners with the implementation of the Act.
- The Implementation Taskforce is working with the Victorian Healthcare Association to develop models of care for health services.
- These models of care will be developed for different sized health services, recognise varying levels of involvement and allow for flexibility depending on location and availability and capability of the workforce.
- The models of care will help to provide consistency across Victoria, which will help patients navigate the system.
- The Victorian Healthcare Association will liaise with health services over the next year to give health services time for the models of care to be reflected in their policies prior to voluntary assisted dying becoming legal on 19 June 2019.
- Four Voluntary Assisted Dying Care Coordinator positions will be funded to provide ongoing coordination throughout the voluntary assisted dying process, including emotional support and follow up for the person, their carer/s and family, identification of any gaps in existing support, practical support and bereavement support.

What are some of the issues health services should be considering now?

- The views of their staff and whether staff are willing to participate in voluntary assisted dying.
- Whether staff need further information about voluntary assisted dying to help them understand the upcoming changes to the law.
- How staff can be supported to find information on voluntary assisted dying and what information and support the health service will provide to their staff.
- What policy and procedures will need to be implemented to support staff to manage a request for voluntary assisted dying.
- The governance and leadership arrangements necessary to respond to voluntary assisted dying.
- Whether patients who request voluntary assisted dying will be referred to other health services, and how this could be facilitated.
- How patients requesting access to voluntary assisted dying will be supported.

Where can I find further information about voluntary assisted dying?

- The Implementation Taskforce will continue to work with health services and existing professional organisations to provide information and support.
- Further information can be found at: <https://www2.health.vic.gov.au/hospitals-and-health-services/patient-care/end-of-life-care/voluntary-assisted-dying>