Accessing voluntary assisted dying in Western Australia

Choosing the Contact Person

Summary
This information sheet is for people who want to know more about choosing a person to take on the role of the Contact Person as part of the voluntary assisted dying process that will become a legal option in Western Australia (WA) from 1 July 2021.

Key points include:

- Voluntary assisted dying allows an eligible person to legally access medication that will cause their death. This medication is called the voluntary assisted dying substance.
- A person who intends to take the voluntary assisted dying substance themselves rather than have it administered by a medical practitioner (doctor) or nurse practitioner must choose a Contact Person.
- The Contact person has responsibilities under the law, especially where there may be unused or remaining voluntary assisted dying substance.
- Anyone over 18 years of age can agree to be the Contact Person, including any health professional involved in the care of a person intending to access voluntary assisted dying.

Why is a Contact Person needed?
Voluntary assisted dying allows an eligible person to legally access medication that will cause their death. This medication is called the voluntary assisted dying substance. The person, in discussion with their Coordinating Practitioner, will decide if they will self-administer the voluntary assisted dying substance (take it themselves) or have a medical practitioner or nurse practitioner administer it to them.

If a person has decided to self-administer the voluntary assisted dying substance, the law requires that they choose a Contact Person.

What does the Contact Person do?
The Contact Person will be responsible for giving any unused or remaining substance to an Authorised Disposer for correct disposal. This will be necessary if a person intending to access voluntary assisted dying:

- Already has the voluntary assisted dying substance but dies before they self-administer it.
- Already has the voluntary assisted dying substance but changes their mind about self-administering it (formally revokes their decision).
- Self-administers the voluntary assisted dying substance but substance remains after their death. The voluntary assisted dying substance will be carefully measured to be the exact amount needed so this is very unlikely.

Given the lethal nature of the voluntary assisted dying substance, giving the unused or remaining substance for correct disposal within the required timeframe (14 days after the day on which the person dies or
revokes their decision) is very important. Under the law there are penalties for the Contact Person if they do not do this.

Additional information on the role and responsibilities of the Contact Person is available in the information sheet [Voluntary assisted dying in Western Australia – Being the Contact Person](#).

**Who can be the Contact Person?**

Anyone who has reached 18 years of age can agree to be the Contact Person, including any health professional involved in the care of a person intending to access voluntary assisted dying.

The Contact Person does not have to be the partner or a close family member of the person intending to access voluntary assisted dying. In fact, those closest to the person may find it too hard to have an extra responsibility in the days after their death. Ideally, the role should be given to someone who is able to manage it, without being too weighed down by it.

The Contact Person will also need to have access to any unused or remaining voluntary assisted dying substance after the person dies and be comfortable with being known to the Voluntary Assisted Dying Board and the Coordinating Practitioner.

As the Contact Person has special responsibilities under the law, they must agree to take on the role.

More information for the Contact Person is included in the information sheet [Voluntary assisted dying in Western Australia – Being the Contact Person](#).

**Support for the Contact Person**

The Statewide VAD Care Navigator Service has been specifically established to support anyone involved with voluntary assisted dying in WA. From 1 July 2021, the Care Navigators will be able to provide advice and support for the Contact Person while they are in this role.

**Glossary of terms**

Refer to [Accessing voluntary assisted dying in Western Australia - Glossary of terms](#) for explanations of key terms used within this information sheet.

**Acknowledgement**

Some content in this document is based on the resources of the Victorian Department of Health and Human Services and has been used with permission.

This information sheet will be updated on 1 July 2021 and cannot be considered accurate after this date.