

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.

Key points include:

- Voluntary assisted dying is a legal process that enables a patient to access medication that will cause their death. This medication is called the voluntary assisted dying substance.
- A patient who has decided to self-administer the voluntary assisted dying substance (take it themselves) rather than have it administered by a medical practitioner (doctor) or nurse practitioner **must** choose a Contact Person.
- The Contact Person has several responsibilities under the *Voluntary Assisted Dying Act 2019* (the Act), including a requirement to give unused or remaining voluntary assisted dying substance to an Authorised Disposer. There are penalties for failing to comply with this requirement.
- 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 is a legal process that enables a patient to legally access medication that will cause their death. This medication is called the voluntary assisted dying substance. The patient may choose to take the voluntary assisted dying substance themselves or may have the substance administered to them by a medical practitioner or nurse practitioner.

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

What does the Contact Person do?

The Contact Person is responsible for giving any unused or remaining substance to an Authorised Disposer for correct disposal. This will be necessary if a patient:

- 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 self-administration decision).
- self-administers the voluntary assisted dying substance but some substance remains after their death. The voluntary assisted dying substance is 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 (within 14 days after the day on which the person dies or revokes their decision) is very important. If the Contact Person fails to do this, they could face a penalty of imprisonment for 12 months.

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 responsibilities under the Act, they **must** agree to take on the role.

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*.

Support for the Contact Person

The Western Australian Voluntary Assisted Dying Statewide Care Navigator Service has been established to support anyone involved with voluntary assisted dying in WA. The Care Navigators can provide ongoing support to the Contact Person and are contactable by email and phone during standard work hours (8:30am – 5:00pm).

Email: VADcarenavigator@health.wa.gov.au

Phone: (08) 9431 2755

Where can I find more information?

For further information please visit the Department of Health WA website ww2.health.wa.gov.au/voluntaryassisteddying

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

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