Accessing voluntary assisted dying in Western Australia

Making the First Request

Summary

This information sheet is for people who want to know more about starting the process to access voluntary assisted dying, once it becomes a legal option in Western Australia (WA) from 1 July 2021. This information sheet will outline the process for making the First Request and the possible outcomes of the request.

Key points include:

- A person can start the voluntary assisted dying process by making a formal First Request to a medical practitioner (such as a GP or a specialist doctor) during a medical consultation.
- The request should be clear, so the medical practitioner knows exactly what is being asked of them. Using the words ‘voluntary assisted dying’ will help the medical practitioner understand that a First Request is being made.
- If the medical practitioner does not agree with voluntary assisted dying (conscientiously objects) they must tell the person immediately and provide them with the Approved Information for a Person Making a First Request for Voluntary Assisted Dying information sheet.
- If the medical practitioner doesn’t conscientiously object to voluntary assisted dying, they have two (2) business days to decide if they will accept or refuse the First Request.
- The Statewide VAD Care Navigator Service can help to connect a person to a medical practitioner who is willing and eligible to participate in the voluntary assisted dying process.

Making a First Request

If you have made the decision that you want to access voluntary assisted dying, you will need to start the process by making a request for voluntary assisted dying. This is known as the First Request.

To be considered a formal First Request, you must:

- make the request to a registered medical practitioner (such as a GP or a specialist doctor)
- make the request during a medical consultation (an appointment or meeting with the GP or specialist doctor)
- make it clear that you want to access voluntary assisted dying

You can make the First Request in person or during a videoconference telehealth appointment where the medical practitioner can see and hear you and discuss your decision with you. You cannot make the request over the phone if the medical practitioner is not able to see you as well as hear you.

Your request should be clear, so the medical practitioner knows exactly what you are asking of them. While you don’t have to use the words ‘voluntary assisted dying’, it will help the medical practitioner understand that you are making a First Request. A suggested way of making your first request is to ask: ‘Will you help me to access voluntary assisted dying?’
The most important thing is to make it clear that you are asking for help to end your life in this way. You may find that the medical practitioner asks you questions to clarify that you are asking for assistance to die. It is important to remember that you will not be able to make a First Request before 1 July 2021.

**Outcome of the First Request**

Once you have made the First Request to a medical practitioner, they must decide whether to accept or refuse it.

If the medical practitioner intends to refuse your request because of a conscientious objection they must inform you **immediately** and give you the Approved Information for a Person Making a First Request for Voluntary Assisted Dying information sheet. This will include important information about accessing voluntary assisted dying, including other resources and people you can contact to assist or support you.

If the medical practitioner doesn't immediately accept your First Request, they have up to two (2) business days to make their decision (not including the day you make the request). Not all medical practitioners will be able to accept a First Request for voluntary assisted dying, even if they would like to. They may not be eligible or able to participate.

The medical practitioner should notify you of their decision as soon as possible, and definitely within two (2) business days.

**Regardless of whether the medical practitioner accepts or refuses your request, they must give you the Approved Information for a Person Making a First Request for Voluntary Assisted Dying information sheet.**

**After the First Request**

If the medical practitioner accepts your First Request, they become your Coordinating Practitioner. They will then begin the assessment process with you. The full voluntary assisted dying process is described in the information sheet *Accessing voluntary assisted dying in Western Australia – Overview of the process*.

If the medical practitioner did not accept your First Request, you can choose to make another First Request to a different medical practitioner.

**What if I can’t find a medical practitioner to ask for voluntary assisted dying?**

If you can’t find a medical practitioner to be your Coordinating Practitioner, you can contact the Statewide VAD Care Navigator Service.

From 1 July 2021, the Care Navigators will be able to help you find a medical practitioner who can assess your eligibility for access to voluntary assisted dying.

**Regional Access Support Scheme (RASS)**

If you live outside of the metropolitan region and are not able to access a medical practitioner in your local area, the Care Navigators may be able to support you through the Regional Access Support Scheme. This scheme can assist you to travel to a medical practitioner to access voluntary assisted dying or, if you are unable to travel, it can support a medical practitioner to travel to you.

**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.