

Voluntary assisted dying in Western Australia

Being the Contact Person

Summary

This information sheet is for people who want to know more about the role of the Contact Person in the voluntary assisted dying process.

Key points include:

- Voluntary assisted dying is the legal process that enables a patient to access a medication that will cause their death. This medication is called the voluntary assisted dying substance.
- A patient who intends 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 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. These are detailed below.
- Anyone over 18 years of age can agree to be the Contact Person, including any health professional involved in the care of a patient intending to access voluntary assisted dying.
- There are resources available to support the Contact Person while they are in the role.

Why is the Contact Person needed?

Voluntary assisted dying is the legal process that enables a patient to access a medication that will cause their death. This medication is called the voluntary assisted dying substance. The information sheets [Accessing voluntary assisted dying in Western Australia – Who is eligible?](#) and [Accessing voluntary assisted dying in Western Australia – Overview of the process](#) outline the eligibility criteria, key steps and roles involved in the voluntary assisted dying process.

If a person has decided to self-administer the voluntary assisted dying substance (take it themselves), they **must** choose a Contact Person. The Contact Person needs to be appointed before the patient's Coordinating Practitioner can prescribe the voluntary assisted dying substance. Things to be considered in choosing a Contact Person are outlined in the information sheet [Accessing voluntary assisted dying in Western Australia – Choosing the Contact Person](#).

Having a Contact Person is not necessary if a medical practitioner or nurse practitioner is going to administer the voluntary assisted dying substance to the 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.

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

How is the Contact Person appointed?

To appoint a Contact Person, the patient and the person who has agreed to be the Contact Person will need to complete the **Contact Person Appointment Form**. Once completed, this form must be given to the Coordinating Practitioner (the medical practitioner who is organising the process). Within two (2) days after receiving the Contact Person Appointment Form, the Coordinating Practitioner must give a copy of it to the Voluntary Assisted Dying Board. The Contact Person should therefore be comfortable with the Coordinating Practitioner and the Voluntary Assisted Dying Board knowing who they are.

Once appointed, the Contact Person will be sent information by the Voluntary Assisted Dying Board that outlines their responsibilities.

Being the Contact Person is entirely voluntary and the person in the role can refuse to continue in the role at any point. If this happens, the Contact Person must inform the patient that they will no longer be the Contact Person.

The patient must then appoint a new Contact Person by filling out a new Contact Person Appointment Form and giving the new **Contact Person Appointment Form** to the Coordinating Practitioner who will submit it to the Voluntary Assisted Dying Board.

What does the Contact Person have to do?

An Authorised Supplier is authorised to supply the voluntary assisted dying substance prescribed by the Coordinating Practitioner. An Authorised Disposer is authorised to dispose of any voluntary assisted dying substance that is not used.

Under the Act, the Contact Person:

- is authorised to **receive** the voluntary assisted dying substance from the Authorised Supplier, possess and then **supply** the substance (hand it over) to the patient. They must also **give** the patient the written information that is provided by the Authorised Supplier and accompanies the substance.
- The Contact Person must **inform** the Coordinating Practitioner when the patient dies (either through self-administering the voluntary assisted dying substance or from some other cause).
- In certain situations, outlined in further detail below, the Contact Person must **give** the voluntary assisted dying substance (or any unused substance) to an Authorised Disposer so that they can safely dispose of it.

In most cases, there will not be any unused voluntary assisted dying substance at the end of the process. However, there are a few situations in which the Contact Person will need to give unused or remaining substance to an Authorised Disposer.

1. If a patient already has the voluntary assisted dying substance but dies before they can self-administer it and the Contact Person knows that there is unused voluntary assisted dying substance; or
2. If a person already has the voluntary assisted dying substance but changes their mind about self-administering it (revokes their self-administration decision); or
3. If a person self-administers the voluntary assisted dying substance but unused substance remains after their death and the Contact Person knows that there is unused voluntary assisted dying substance remaining. 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 to an Authorised Disposer within the required timeframe (i.e. within 14 days after the day on which the person dies or revokes their decision) is very important. If the Contact Person fails to comply with this requirement, they could face a penalty of imprisonment for 12 months.

Support for the Contact Person

Being the Contact Person for someone who is accessing voluntary assisted dying is a very important role that has significant responsibilities.

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

Email: VADcarenavigator@health.wa.gov.au

Phone: (08) 9431 2755

In addition, the medical practitioners and other health professionals involved in a person's care (e.g. Coordinating Practitioner, nurse etc.) may also be able to offer advice or answer questions that the Contact Person might have.

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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