

Navigating the topic of Voluntary Assisted Dying in Advance Care Planning Conversations

CONSUMER FACT SHEET



Advance care planning

Advance care planning is a process of planning for future health and personal care whereby the person's values, beliefs and preferences are made known to guide decision-making at a future time when that person cannot make or communicate their wishes. It is a voluntary process where discussions may lead to formally documenting wishes and preferences in an advance care planning document.

Voluntary assisted dying

Voluntary assisted dying is one end-of-life treatment option available to terminally ill people with decision-making capacity who satisfy the legal eligibility criteria. A person assessed as eligible for voluntary assisted dying may access medication at a time of their choosing that will end their life. The medication can either be taken by the person themselves or be administered by a qualified health professional. Voluntary assisted dying is something you may wish to discuss during an advance care planning conversation. A health professional may also raise this option with you.

Advance care planning and voluntary assisted dying are different

Advance care planning relies on a person's previously specified wishes and preferences to guide their care at a point in time when the person **is unable to make decisions for themselves**. Voluntary assisted dying as a treatment option can only be accessed by a person when they **are able to make decisions for themselves**.

This means:

- Voluntary assisted dying cannot be requested through an advance care planning document such as an advance care directive.
- The request for voluntary assisted dying cannot be made on someone else's behalf. It must come from the person who wishes to access voluntary assisted dying.

Key facts:

- Advance care planning is important. If you have a life-limiting condition you may want to consider all end-of-life care options available to you, including palliative care and voluntary assisted dying. It's important to discuss your wishes and preferences about end-of-life care with your substitute decision-maker/s, family, and health professionals. You should think about formally documenting those wishes and preferences.
- The voluntary assisted dying application process takes time. If you wish to access voluntary assisted dying, you should consider planning for this early.
- In some states, health professionals are not allowed to raise the topic of voluntary assisted dying with you. If voluntary assisted dying is something you wish to explore, you may need to initiate the topic during discussions, including advance care planning discussions, with your health professional or treating team.
- If you raise voluntary assisted dying with a health professional and they are not comfortable discussing it with you, ask them to provide you with the details of the voluntary assisted dying navigator service (or equivalent). This is a free service that can provide you with information about voluntary assisted dying.
- When undertaking advance care planning, you may choose to talk about or write down your wish to access voluntary assisted dying. This can help your substitute decision-maker/s, family and health professionals understand what matters to you, if you lose the ability to make your own decisions. But it is important to know that you cannot request voluntary assisted dying as an end-of-life treatment option in an advance care planning document.

Further information

For information about finding support to seek voluntary assisted dying, see: https://eprints.qut.edu.au/243169/1/Finding_support_to_seek_VAD_Information_for_consumers_and_caregivers.pdf

For more information about voluntary assisted dying in your state and territory, see: <https://end-of-life.qut.edu.au/assisteddying>

For more information about advance care planning, see: <https://www.advancecareplanning.org.au/>

This fact sheet draws on Ben P White, Madeleine Archer, Casey M Haining & Lindy Willmott. Implications of voluntary assisted dying for advance care planning. Medical Journal of Australia 2024 220(3): 129-133. <https://doi.org/10.5694/mja2.52183>

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Advance Care Planning Australia™ (ACPA) is a national project funded by the Australian Government Department of Health and Aged Care, enabling Australians to make the best choices for their future health and care.