



ANMF (Vic Branch) Policy

Voluntary euthanasia / assisted dying

Assisted dying is now law in a number of countries around the world including some American states such as Washington and Oregon where the legislation has been in place for 20 years, the Netherlands, Belgium, Luxembourg, Canada and Switzerland to ensure patient choice free from improper influence and to provide legal certainty for health practitioners when assisting with voluntary euthanasia/assisted dying.

In the Australian context, voluntary euthanasia/assisted dying was legal in the NT and ACT in 1995 but was overturned by the Federal Government in 1997. Both NSW and Victoria are contemplating legislation in Australia.

There is ongoing community debate surrounding voluntary euthanasia/assisted dying. The Australian Nursing and Midwifery Federation (Victorian Branch) [ANMF (Vic Branch)] maintains all nurses/midwives need to be reliably informed about, and have a sound understanding of, the possible ramifications of this debate for the profession and practice of nursing and midwifery.

It is the policy of the ANMF (Vic Branch) that:

1. The ANMF (Vic Branch) has a responsibility to provide information for nurses and midwives on ethical/legal/clinical/cultural issues with respect to the practice of voluntary euthanasia/assisted dying.
2. The ANMF (Vic Branch) supports legislative reform that enables persons with a terminal illness whose prognosis is such that death is likely within 12 months, to choose to die with dignity in a manner acceptable to them; and not be compelled to suffer beyond their wishes.
3. The ANMF (Vic Branch) supports the right of patients to high quality palliative care, but also recognises there are some circumstances in which palliative care cannot alleviate all pain and suffering.
4. As voluntary euthanasia/assisted dying can have ethical, legal and clinical practice implications for all health professionals, the role of nurses and midwives must be clearly prescribed and be within the boundaries of acceptable nursing/midwifery practice, including ethical, conduct and practice standards for registered nurses, registered midwives, enrolled nurses and nurse practitioners.
5. The ANMF (Vic Branch) supports voluntary euthanasia/assisted dying legislation that has safeguards in place to ensure:
 - a) the involvement of more than one medical practitioner's assessment;
 - b) the legitimacy of the request is valid;
 - c) the patient is making an informed choice;

- d) an appropriate cooling off period between the time a request to access voluntary euthanasia/assisted dying is made and it being carried out;
- e) that the independent medical practitioner's assessment excludes mental health patients;
- f) nurses and midwives are able to exercise conscientious objection to involvement in euthanasic practices;
- g) it not be an offence for a nurse or midwife to confidentially advise, assist, support or be present when a patient is exercising their choice; and
- h) all other exclusions consistent with the recommendations of the parliamentary "Inquiry into end of life choices" dated June 2016.

6. The ANMF (Vic Branch) is responsible for:

- a) participating in and responding to public discussion/debate on voluntary euthanasia /assisted dying; and
- b) promoting and developing a nursing/midwifery perspective in public and political domains, and legislative changes that are based on current evidence.