Palliative Care Queensland has acknowledged the findings of the Inquiry into Voluntary Assisted Dying (VAD) undertaken as part of the Inquiry into Aged Care, End-of-Life and Palliative Care tabled by the Queensland Government Health, Communities, Disability Services and Domestic and Family Violence Prevention Committee.

Palliative Care Queensland (PCQ) neither advocates for nor argues against, VAD. Yet in the VAD deliberations to come, the organisation emphasises that palliative care systems and services play a crucial role, providing care for Queenslanders experiencing loss, ageing, dying and grief, and by reducing periods of stress and grief for loved ones. The essential role palliative care services play cannot be forgotten.

As the peak body and leading charity for palliative care in Queensland, Palliative Care Queensland’s President John Haberecht acknowledged the report, “As an organisation, we welcome open discussion regarding loss, ageing, dying and grief. We believe it is up to society and politicians to determine if VAD should be legalised or not, however we urge the Government and society not to forget that VAD will only be available for approximately 1% of the population and palliative care must always be available for 100% of the population, whether VAD is introduced or not. Yet currently in Queensland it is not.” said Mr Haberecht.

“Currently, Queenslanders’ access to palliative care is a lottery based on where they live, their age, their illness, their culture and even the way their local Hospital and Health Service (HHS) allocates its funding.” This was highlighted in the report tabled by the same committee last week.

“While PCQ is neutral in the VAD debate, we are concerned that Queenslanders could choose VAD because they do not have access to quality palliative care. Palliative Care Queensland urges the State and Federal Governments to collaborate and increase funding for palliative care services across Queensland, ensuring that funds are accountable, equitable and transparent. We request that these funds are allocated immediately to reshape the palliative care sector into a fit-for-purpose model for all Queenslanders.”

“If VAD is legalised, palliative care services will never abandon a person who explores or partakes in VAD, and we will not change their level of support or care, regardless of the ultimate decision taken,” said Mr Haberecht.

As the government deliberates VAD legislation, we urge them to remember that palliative care is an evidence-based strategy that can help Queenslanders by preventing and relieving suffering through the early identification, assessment and treatment of pain and other problems, whether physical, psychosocial or spiritual. (1)
The way we care for our dying is a significant indicator of the kind of society we are. Palliative Care is a human right that should be available to all Queenslanders, and one that is in significant need of investment to continue to offer care to community members and to meet the ever-increasing demand for support and services.

“During the discussions to come regarding VAD we encourage everyone involved to pay particular attention to the seven guiding principles for voluntary assisted dying developed by Palliative Care Australia. The principles outline the many ethical, personal and professional issues that the introduction of VAD will bring to professional and volunteer carers,” said Mr Haberecht.

Given the role of Palliative Care Queensland, Mr Haberecht called on government and legislators to ensure the peak body has a seat at the table as legislation is developed and reviewed.

“Palliative care providers exist to offer the best possible care, support and comfort to people with a life-limiting illness and their loved ones. The introduction of Voluntary Assisted Dying, will not change that approach, but our association must have a seat at the table to ensure that legislation reflects the needs of our members and the vital role we will play in supporting, educating and caring for patients, families, healthcare professionals and the wider community,” said Mr Haberecht.

Mr Haberecht also believes that the report’s recommendations on VAD necessitate a reminder that Queenslanders should never have to choose VAD to end “intolerable suffering” without first being able to access excellent palliative care when and where they need it. Interstate and overseas experience tells us less than 1% of people with a terminal illness are likely to access VAD, but palliative care could improve the lives and the deaths of 100% of Queenslanders who die.

-ENDS-

The committee has today tabled ‘Report No. 34, 56th Parliament – Voluntary assisted dying. This report is published online here. The report includes 21 recommendations in relation to the committee’s findings on voluntary assisted dying.

A summary of the report has also been published. This is titled ‘Paper No. 5, 56th Parliament - Summary of the findings and recommendations from Report No. 34 on voluntary assisted dying’. This is published online here.

The committee’s ‘Report No. 33, 56th Parliament - Aged care, end-of-life and palliative care’ was tabled on 24 March 2020 and is published online here.
