

# Media Release

**The Hon Jenny Mikakos MLC**

Deputy Leader of the Government in the Legislative Council

Minister for the Coordination of Health and Human Services – COVID-19

Minister for Health

Minister for Ambulance Services



Tuesday, 1 September 2020

## VAD LAWS GIVING MORE VICTORIANS CHOICE OVER THEIR DEATH

Just over one year since its implementation, our voluntary assisted dying laws are giving Victorians suffering with a terminal illness greater choice over the timing and manner of their death.

Minister for Health Jenny Mikakos welcomed the third report of the independent Voluntary Assisted Dying Review Board, led by former Supreme Court Justice Betty King QC, which was tabled in Parliament today.

The latest report shows that of the 231 permits issued, 124 Victorians suffering with a terminal illness had accessed the laws in the last 12 months, affording them compassionate care at the end of their life.

The report also shows the widespread need for the legislation, with 38 per cent of applications from people living in regional Victoria. Similarly, applications were received from Victorians across a spectrum of ages – from 32 to 100 – with an average age of 71 years.

Of those who have died, 78 per cent had a cancer diagnosis, 15 per cent had a neurodegenerative disease like motor neurone disease (MND), and seven per cent had other untreatable diseases including pulmonary fibrosis, cardiomyopathy or chronic obstructive pulmonary disease.

And reflecting the rapid decline of people experiencing many of these illnesses, half of all applicants proceeded from their first to last request within 19 days. Most permits were then issued within two days.

The number of medical practitioners trained and registered to support voluntary assisted dying increased by 30 per cent from the first six months, with 37 per cent located outside metropolitan Melbourne.

The report shows that one application was deemed non-compliant. Although the applicant was fully eligible to access the scheme – and demonstrating the strict level of oversight – the Board's review process identified an administrative error with the paperwork completed by a medical practitioner.

Ensuring we continue to protect patients and their families, the matter has been referred to the Australian Health Practitioner Regulation Agency for review and any follow-up action.

The independent Board has also used the review to repeat its calls to reform Commonwealth laws that effectively prevent telehealth being used to discuss voluntary assisted dying.

This has proven to be a barrier for accessing voluntary assisted dying, particularly for regional patients or those too ill to attend an appointment in person. The coronavirus pandemic has further highlighted these access issues, prompting the Board to again call for change to the Commonwealth law.

### Quotes attributable to Minister for Health Jenny Mikakos

*"Our voluntary assisted dying laws are giving Victorians who are suffering an incurable illness at the end of their lives a compassionate choice."*

*"This review shows that the system is working as it should – with 68 rigorous safeguards in place, making our model the most conservative system in the world."*

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### **Quote attributable to Board Chairperson Betty King**

*“In the past six months, access to voluntary assisted dying has become more streamlined. There are more doctors on board and essential support services have expanded, especially in regional and rural Victoria.”*

### **Key statistics June 2019 to July 2020**

348 people assessed for eligibility to access

272 eligible applicants applied for a permit

231 permits issued

124 people died from prescribed medications