

Media Release

The Hon Martin Foley MP
Minister for Health
Minister for Ambulance Services
Minister for Equality



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MORE VICTORIANS WITH INCURABLE ILLNESSES ACCESSING VAD

More Victorians suffering an incurable illness are making a compassionate choice and accessing voluntary assisted dying – as the inaugural Board chair steps down after two years of the historic laws in Victoria.

Minister for Health Martin Foley thanked Justice Betty King QC, outgoing Chair of Victoria’s independent Voluntary Assisted Dying Review Board, for her incredible contribution establishing the safe operation of the law.

After retiring as Supreme Court Justice in 2015, Justice King returned to public service when she was appointed the inaugural chair of the board in 2018. With the program now established, she announced her decision to step away – with Deputy Chair Charlie Corke acting until a new chair is appointed.

The Board’s report detailing the first two years of voluntary assisted dying was released in Parliament today, showing 331 terminally ill Victorians chose an assisted death since the law came into effect on 19 June 2019.

From 1 January to 30 June 2021, 255 people were assessed for eligibility to access voluntary assisted dying and 192 permits were issued. A total of 101 permit holders died from taking the prescribed medication.

Across Victoria access is also improving with more than 500 medical professionals registered for the online training program – up 12.3 per cent in six months. There was also a 17.8 per cent increase in the number of practitioners actively supporting at least one case.

To date, more than 82 per cent of voluntary assisted dying applicants were accessing palliative care services at the time of commencing the application process.

The report shows applicants faced several issues relating to attending in-person medical appointments, particularly where people are very ill and may have to travel long distances.

As the COVID-19 pandemic continues, the Board has used the report to repeat calls for the Commonwealth Government to reconsider restrictions on using telehealth for conversations about voluntary assisted dying.

This is the last of the Board’s six-monthly reports as the legislation now enters its third year. Moving forward, the Board will report annually. The report is available at bettersafecare.vic.gov.au/vad.

Quotes attributable to Minister for Health Martin Foley

“Justice King has been instrumental in overseeing the safe operation of VAD in its first two years – she has always provided frank advice on where the system can be improved for terminally ill people, their families and doctors.”

“Leaving yet another important legacy, I thank Justice King for her service for the people of Victoria and I wish her all the best as she returns to her retirement plans.”

Quotes attributable to Board Chairperson Betty King

“As the program has now moved beyond establishment, I feel it’s a suitable time for my departure from the Board. It has been a privilege to lead the implementation of what was such a historic step forward in providing more compassionate choices for people nearing the end of their life.”

“I’d like to thank the many people and organisations involved in creating and implementing Victoria’s voluntary assisted dying program over these first two years. It is pleasing to see more medical practitioners joining the program as it continues, and to also see the program being improved based on the feedback of all involved.”

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