

Putting patients first in end of life decisions

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WA Primary Health Alliance supports community and clinician involvement in the creation of the voluntary assisted dying legislation currently before the WA Parliament.

Western Australians have clearly expressed their wish to choose a compassionate and dignified death, when their condition can no longer be relieved by palliative measures.

Many people feel reassured simply by knowing voluntary assisted dying is available, whether or not it is used.

It has also been made clear that this choice should be limited to circumstances where a person is terminally ill, has the capacity to make the decision and is protected from coercion.

WA Primary Health Alliance Board Chair, Dr Richard Choong, said both the community and the medical profession had been involved in extensive consultations, and while he respected the differing views, he acknowledged the desire for change from many in the community.

Dr Choong emphasised that GP involvement will be determined by personal, cultural and religious beliefs, and the guiding ethical principles of his profession.

“The Ministerial Expert Panel has listened to communities and experts. What they heard was that while high quality, widely available palliative care and pain control remain critical elements of end of life care, they are not enough in all cases,” Dr Choong said.

“Continued prioritisation of investment in accessible and equitable palliative care is a key part of end of life care, and we commend the McGowan Government’s recent commitments in this area.

“Both patients and GPs must be appropriately supported if any legislation for voluntary assisted dying comes into the clinical setting.

“GPs intending to participate in voluntary assisted dying will opt into the process and, in collaboration with WA Health, WA Primary Health Alliance will support participating GPs with the appropriate resources and information.

“GPs who choose not to participate will also receive our support to ensure their patients are enabled to access to voluntary assisted dying, if that is their wish.”

ENDS

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About WA Primary Health Alliance: WA Primary Health Alliance shapes, strengthens and sustains a health system that works for people. As the operator of WA’s three Primary Health Networks – part of the Australian Government’s national PHN program – we plan, guide and direct investment towards important primary healthcare services.

By partnering with GPs, allied health professionals, service providers, government and community, we can deliver better health, together. For more information, visit www.wapha.org.au