Position Statement on Voluntary Assisted Dying (VAD)

November 2026

Summary

Voluntary assisted dying (VAD) means a person chooses to get medical help to end their life. People may think about VAD if they have a terminal illness or condition that causes unbearable suffering and they are not expected to live much longer.

In Australia, VAD is available in all states and territories, except Northern Territory. Each state and territory has its own rules about who can use VAD.

Huntington's Australia understands that VAD is a personal and complex issue. It affects people, families, carers, health workers, and communities in different ways. People with Huntington's disease have many different views about VAD, shaped by their experiences, values, beliefs, culture, family situations, and stage of illness.

As an organisation, Huntington's Australia does not try to influence anyone's personal decisions about VAD. We support the rights of people impacted by Huntington's disease to make informed choices, access quality care and support, and have their dignity, autonomy, and wishes respected.

VAD in Australia: laws and definitions

Voluntary assisted dying is a legal process that allows eligible people get medical help to end their life. In Australia, all states and the Australian Capital Territory have VAD laws, but the Northern Territory does not.

VAD laws are strict, and the rules are different in each state and territory. Regardless of location, to be eligible for VAD, the law requires a person to:

- be at least 18 years old and an Australian citizen, and
- be able to make their own decisions without being pressured or forced by others, and
- have a disease, illness, or medical condition that causes unbearable suffering and is likely to lead to death within a certain period.

VAD must be voluntary, so a person decides freely and is able to make that choice. It can involve self-administration, where someone takes the medication to end their life themselves, or practitioner administration, where a qualified health professional gives the medication.

> **VAD for people with HD would give families peace of mind, by allowing loved ones to end severe suffering on their terms. People with HD face a long painful decline with loss of body and mind. Having this choice offers dignity, control and relief from extreme fear and pain.**
>
> Family member of someone living with HD

Huntington's disease and voluntary assisted dying

As the national body supporting people and families impacted by Huntington's disease in Australia, we understand that our community has many different views on Voluntary Assisted Dying. Huntington's Australia respects that every opinion is valid, and the decision comes with many considerations, including:

- Some people with Huntington's disease face changes in thinking, communication, and ability, which can make life more difficult.
- Family members and carers deal with emotional, ethical, and practical challenges that need understanding and support.
- Access to healthcare, disability support, and palliative care all affect end-of-life experiences.

There is no single approach that suits everyone or every family.

Huntington's Australia

Huntington's Australia's position on VAD

We support the rights of people impacted by Huntington's disease to make informed choices about Voluntary Assisted Dying, and to have their dignity, autonomy, and wishes respected.

> **For the last 5 years, my husband of 54 years has been asking for my help to end his life, as he has Huntington's disease and advanced prostate cancer. The constant mental pain that he tries to describe is unbelievable, and as there is no known cure for this disease, we rely on medication to help him be comfortable, which does not cut it.**
>
> **This is a man who was a talented tradesman who could put his hand to fixing everything, who now cannot put a screw in the wall or use his welding equipment. He has raised 5 sons, one of whom was diagnosed with Huntington's Disease and took his own life 2 years ago.**
>
> Partner of someone living with HD

Huntington's Australia also supports the following:

- Everyone should have access to accurate, balanced, and evidence-based information about their end-of-life options.
- People should be able to access high-quality neurological care, disability support, mental health care, palliative care, and support for carers.
- We encourage respectful conversations about VAD, free from stigma or judgement.
- Strong safeguards should be in place to protect people from pressure and to make sure decisions around VAD are truly voluntary.
- People with lived experience should be meaningfully involved in developing policies, laws, research, and services.

As the national body for Huntington's disease in Australia, we advocate for:

- Policies that respect personal choice and protect people who may be vulnerable.
- Disability rights at the heart of discussions about end-of-life decisions.
- Fair access to support and services, no matter where they live, their financial situation, or the stage of their disease.
- Increased awareness of HD, and its unique challenges, from health professionals.

Ultimately, Huntington's Australia respects the individual's right to decide what's best for them.

Would you like more information on VAD?

To learn more about voluntary assisted dying, access these resources.

- Factsheet from government healthcare site Health Direct Australia Voluntary assisted dying | healthdirect

- State and territory health departments for the latest legislation: State and territory health departments | Australian Government Department of Health, Disability and Ageing