

Westminster Hall Debate on Assisted Dying

A briefing to help you write to your MP to ask him/her to attend a parliamentary debate on assisted dying on **Thursday 23 January** and to speak against it.

What is happening?

On **Thursday 23 January at 3pm**, Christine Jardine MP is introducing a Westminster Hall debate on assisted dying. Westminster Hall debates give MPs an opportunity to raise local or national issues and receive a response from a government minister. These debates cannot change the law and are not voted on. However, this debate is part of the assisted suicide lobby's push to change the law, so it is vital that MPs attend and speak against it.

What we are asking you to do

Please email your MP and ask him or her to attend the debate and speak against it. You can use some of the points below.

Six Key Reasons to Oppose Assisted Dying

1. Assisted dying puts pressure on vulnerable people

Offering people the choice to end their lives creates pressure for them to choose death. Where assisted dying is legal, a primary reason people choose to die is because they feel they are a burden on others.

- In **Washington State** in 2017, **56%** of people who were killed by assisted dying said that being a burden on family, friends and caregivers was a reason to end their lives¹.
- In **Oregon** in 2018, **54.2%** of people killed by assisted dying said that being a burden on family, friends and caregivers was a reason to end their lives².

2. Doctors oppose assisted dying

Those who want to legalise assisted dying are pointing to a shift in medical opinion as a justification for pushing for change in the law. Earlier this year the Royal College of Physicians (RCP) conducted a poll of its 36,000 members and has now adopted a position of neutrality on assisted dying. (A neutral position by a medical body is seen as an indication of support for legislative change.)

However, this was a rigged result. In March 2019 only 25% of doctors voted for the RCP to take a neutral stance, and 43.4% of doctors who took part were opposed to a change in the law. (This is only a slight change from 2014 when 44.4% opposed legalising assisted dying.) Dr Gordon Macdonald, Chief Executive of Care Not Killing said:

'[Doctors] recognise the significant problems of scrapping long-held universal values which protect terminally ill, sick and disabled people from feeling pressured into ending their lives because they fear becoming a care or financial burden.'

¹ <https://www.doh.wa.gov/Portals/1/Documents/Pubs/422-109-DeathWithDignityAct2017.pdf>

² <https://www.oregon.gov/oha/PH/PROVIDERPARTNERRESOURCES/EVALUATIONRESEARCH/DEATHWITHDIGNITY YACT/Documents/year21.pdf>

3. Assisted dying is not the answer to pain

Assisted dying is not a solution to pain. Good palliative care should ensure that pain is controlled well. Legalising assisted dying risks less investment being made in palliative care.

Looking at the latest report³ on assisted dying in Oregon, these are the top three reasons people opt for assisted dying:

- loss of autonomy (91.7%),
- decreasing ability to participate in activities that made life enjoyable (90.5%)
- loss of dignity (66.7%).

We must work to enhance life for sick, disabled and elderly people, not pass a law which offers them death as a solution to their problem.

4. Assisted suicide kills those who are not dying

Euthanasia and assisted suicide⁴ (EAS) have been legal in the Netherlands since 2001.

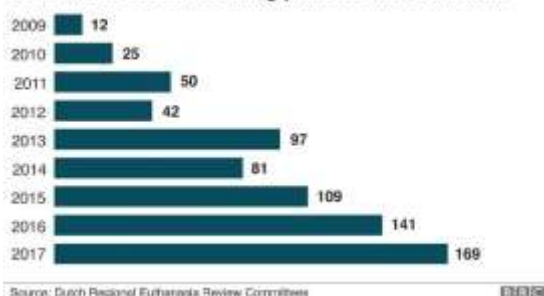
In 2017, 89.4% of cases (5,893) of EAS were people with incurable cancer, neurological disorders (such as Parkinson's disease, multiple sclerosis and motor neurone disease), cardiovascular disease, pulmonary disease or a combination of these conditions⁵.

However, the numbers of people being killed by EAS who were not dying is increasing in the Netherlands.

During 2017:

- In 83 notified cases of euthanasia the patient's suffering was caused by a psychiatric disorder⁶.
- In 166 cases the patient's suffering was caused by early-stage dementia, with an additional three cases of patients with late-stage dementia⁷.

Euthanasia cases involving patients with dementia



There is concern about this trend:

Although it was once unthinkable, physicians, primarily in the Netherlands and Belgium, have helped a small but growing number of patients with mental illness but no terminal condition to end their lives.

*'From a societal perspective, we believe providing a legal option for mentally ill people who are not terminally ill to receive medical assistance in ending their lives is misguided public policy.'*⁸

³ <https://www.doh.wa.gov/Portals/1/Documents/Pubs/422-109-DeathWithDignityAct2017.pdf>

⁴ Assisted dying is used to cover both assisted suicide and euthanasia in countries like Belgium and the Netherlands where both are permitted. Assisted dying is used in the UK (for example in the Marris Bill) where assisted suicide is proposed, but not necessarily euthanasia. In Oregon, for example, where assisted suicide but not euthanasia is legal, the term assisted dying is used.

⁵ Regional Euthanasia Review Committees RTE Annual Report 2017 <https://english.euthanasiecommissie.nl/documents/publications/annual-reports/2002/annual-reports/annualreports>

⁶ Ibid

⁷ Ibid

5. Changing the law will lead to rising numbers of deaths

Wherever euthanasia and assisted suicide have been legalised, the numbers of people being killed in this way have risen steadily.

- **Oregon:** In 1998 there were 16 deaths recorded under the Dignity With Dying Act, which rose to 168 deaths in 2018.¹⁰
- **Washington:** In 2009, the year the law was passed, 47¹¹ people were killed between March and December. 196 people were killed in 2017.¹²
- **Belgium:** In 2002, 24 deaths were reported by the Federal Commission for Euthanasia Control and Evaluation to the Legislative Chambers. 2,022 deaths were reported in 2015.¹³
- **Netherlands:** In 2002¹⁴ there were 1,882 notifications of euthanasia or assisted suicide. In 2017 the number was 6,585.¹⁵

The figures above show how quickly euthanasia and assisted suicide are accepted once legalised. So-called medical assistance in dying (MAiD) was legalised in Canada in 2016. In 2017 a report noted:

‘The degree to which MAiD has become normalized ... throughout Canada was unexpected, particularly in view of the controversy preceding its legalization.’¹⁶

6. Assisted dying is wrong in principle

The most basic reason to oppose legalising assisted dying is because it is wrong in principle.

- Assisted dying allows the lawful killing of innocent people in certain circumstances.
- It is an attack on the ‘inalienable and inviolable’ right to life of innocent human beings as set out in the Universal Declaration of Human Rights.
- It fails to protect the right to life of all citizens no matter how weak, vulnerable or disabled their lives may be.
- It undermines the common good, those aspects of society which benefit everyone.

It undermines the ethical practice of medicine and the trust between medical staff and patient