



Hospice New Zealand position statement on euthanasia and assisted dying.

Palliative care, as defined by the World Health Organisation, “intends neither to hasten nor postpone death”. This philosophy is a cornerstone of hospice care in New Zealand. Palliative care is holistic – physical, emotional, spiritual, social and cultural needs are all valued equally.

Euthanasia and assisted suicide of any kind is currently illegal in New Zealand, and Hospice New Zealand, as an organisation, does not support a change in the law to legalise euthanasia or assisted suicide in any form.

Hospice NZ believes greater access to palliative care will improve end-of-life care for New Zealanders. Greater investment will reduce inequity of access, increase numbers of trained healthcare professionals (across the whole health sector), and provide more resources for Hospice services. This investment should be a major priority for central government.

What we believe:

As an organisation we appreciate that there are a range of views on this challenging and emotive topic; we respect that everyone has the right to their opinion. There are varying views from a spiritual, religious or cultural perspective which may not be the same for all individuals within a group or culture. We acknowledge the impact these beliefs will have on the way a person thinks about euthanasia.

Hospices in New Zealand believe that improving access to hospice and palliative care services should be the priority for Government. This will ensure everyone receives quality care regardless of age, gender, ethnicity, socio-economic status or location. Only when all New Zealanders have ready access to good quality end-of-life care can a balanced discussion begin.

All people should be made aware of options for hospice and palliative care, and should be offered an individual assessment of their needs to ensure that appropriate palliative care is being provided. This should be an integral part of advance care planning.

Greater education of all health professionals is needed to dispel the myths surrounding pain and symptom relief and all aspects of end-of-life care. We encourage all those prescribing medication and providing palliative care to consult with hospice specialist clinicians and other palliative care experts where necessary.

We believe that palliative care should be routinely available to all who need it, and Government should make sufficient funding available to ensure access to palliative care whether provided by a hospital, at home, in residential care facilities or by hospice teams.

Why do we feel this way?

From experience, we know that with the right palliative care a person can have a good quality of life with their dignity maintained and symptoms managed to help them feel as comfortable as possible until their death.

Legalising euthanasia and/or assisted suicide will place pressure on vulnerable people – those living with disabilities, mental health issues, terminal illness – for fear of being a financial, emotional or care burden.

Good palliative care is founded on a trusting relationship between patient, family, whanau and health professional, which is undermined by euthanasia.

Dying is a natural process and part of life, we must focus on helping people to live well until they die. We would like to encourage people to talk about their wishes when it comes to the end of life, informing family and friends what is important to them.

What do others think?

As an organisation we support the thinking of many groups on this topic. Links to their websites below:

- [ANZSPM Aotearoa Branch](#)
- [Palliative Care Nurses New Zealand](#)
- [Care Alliance](#)
- [New Zealand Medical Association](#)
- [International Association for Hospice Palliative Care](#)

Further information:

Hospice NZ has a number of resources on [our website](#) that will be useful to inform discussion, including our [Submission to the Health Committee](#).

Hospice New Zealand would like to acknowledge and thank all those who contributed to the review of this statement.

Last reviewed December 2017