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Multiple reasons to vote End of Life Choice Bill down

The Care Alliance urges MPs to carefully consider the multiple risks of voting through the Second Reading of the End of Life Choice Bill this Wednesday and instead vote the bill down, says Care Alliance Secretary Dr Peter Thirkell.

“The End of Life Choice Bill raises serious public safety issues for all New Zealanders, putting many lives at risk by creating new opportunities for abuse and coercion. This includes Maori and Pasifika people whose bad health statistics make it irresponsible to create a state-sanctioned avenue to death,” Dr Thirkell says.

“Disabled people are at risk in the Bill and they cannot simply be written out of it. Many disabled people live constantly in the shadow of terminal conditions. The real-life experience of disabled people shows that many with serious and obvious disabilities tend to be thought of by medical practitioners as having reached a final stage prematurely.

“The proposed Bill also compels doctors to act against their long-standing ethical standard that physician assisted suicide and euthanasia remain unethical even if they were made legal. Doctors are not necessary in the regulation or practice of assisted suicide and are included only to provide a cloak of medical legitimacy.

“The issues are not just where we start with the law, but where we will end up. Overseas evidence is very troubling. The numbers of euthanasia deaths are growing significantly in countries such as Canada, the Netherlands and Belgium. Eligibility criteria inevitably broaden because once the principle of euthanasia is established, rights-based arguments for expanded eligibility become logical.

“The ripple effects of assisted death laws on suicide rates among young people and others have also not been explored. The experience of health practitioners in New Zealand is that people with mental illnesses, especially young people, are already using the justifications of euthanasia advocates to inform their own rationale for wanting to end their lives.

“There is fledgling evidence from overseas that points to a strong correlation between legalising assisted death and rising rates of suicide. It certainly can't be categorically stated that legalising EAS will not further exacerbate our rates of (non-assisted) suicide.

“There is no need for people to die in pain these days. Palliative care is able to address all forms of suffering – emotional, social and spiritual as well as physical – given time, adequate resourcing and the proper expertise.

“Public safety and protection of the vulnerable rather than personal choice must be the paramount consideration in this Bill. Tougher safeguards may make the practice safer, but they cannot make it safe enough. The key question is the degree of confidence people have that robust safeguards can be implemented so that vulnerable people with illnesses and disabilities will continue to feel valued and not feel under pressure to end their lives prematurely.

“Parliament has a duty to ensure that the degree of safety built into legislation matches the gravity of the risk. The gravity of the risk in the euthanasia bill is wrongful death. One single wrongful death is one too many.”

ENDS

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