



Wednesday, 2 September 2020

MEDIA STATEMENT

On behalf of the Catholic Bishops in Victoria, on the release of the Voluntary Assisted Dying Review Board Report of Operation January – June 2020

“The latest report from the Voluntary Assisted Dying Review Board is not a celebration of good healthcare, but a sad story of the loss of hope and care for vulnerable people.

The report is notable mostly for what it does not address: mental health, the proportion of patients who died alone, and the number of patients who were able to receive a comprehensive palliative care assessment before a VAD assessment.

Despite assurances that VAD numbers would not increase significantly in its early years, the numbers presented in the report are alarming. Comparatively, it took the State of Oregon in the United States 17 years to reach the same number of deaths that Victoria has reached in its first 12 months of VAD.

On the one hand, our nation is making sacrifices to protect people from the Coronavirus pandemic while on the other, this report is encouraging greater access to assisted suicide. The contradiction is baffling to many doctors, which is alluded to in the VAD report but not addressed comprehensively.

Our hearts go out to families in distress at this time and the lack of quality palliative care options available to them. It illustrates, just as recent Royal Commission findings have also shown, that the range of quality aged care options available to Australians is far narrower than what it should be in a prosperous country like ours.

One of the few ‘safeguards’ in the VAD legislation is that doctors are prevented from initiating the conversation with patients. This protects doctors from becoming stewards of death to their patients, and it protects vulnerable patients from having VAD pushed on them. We are surprised and disappointed that the VAD Board is now sympathetic to overturning this safeguard.

Despite the scant detail in the report, we are encouraged by those with the resilience to keep serving patients without resorting to VAD. Catholic healthcare providers will not abandon their patients, and believe they have a right to be loved from the beginning to the end of their life.”

Statement attributable to:

Most Rev Paul Bird CSsR, Bishop of Ballarat
Most Rev Peter A Comensoli, Archbishop of Melbourne
Most Rev Terence Curtin, Auxiliary Bishop of Melbourne
Most Rev Shane Mackinlay, Bishop of Sandhurst
Most Rev Bosco Puthur, Bishop of the Syro-Malabar Eparchy
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