

Humanists Australia strongly supports the *Ensuring Northern Territory Rights Bill 2021*.

Humanists Australia is a national organisation that exists to educate all Australians about humanism as a framework for an ethical, meaningful and fulfilling life.

We believe that all people deserve to live with dignity and have their individual autonomy protected. This includes the freedom to make personal choices about one's own life. These rights should apply to all Australian citizens, including those in the self-governing territories.

Residents of the Northern Territory and Australian Capital Territory should have the same rights of self-determination of how they are governed, and indeed how they choose to live their lives, as do residents of the Australian States. Successive Commonwealth Governments of both political persuasions have granted, maintained and enhanced the democratic self-government of the NT and the ACT over many decades.

The *Euthanasia Laws Act 1997*, which took away self-governing territories' right to legislate for voluntary assisted dying (VAD), was an aberration in the decades-long movement for territory self-government. It was done for the benefit of federal political machines at the expense of the residents of self-governing territories.

In the past decade four Australian states have passed voluntary assisted dying laws. Of the remaining states, Queensland is expected to vote on proposed legislation in the coming weeks, while a bill will soon be introduced to the NSW Parliament. This provides a stark example of the difference in fundamental democratic rights between state and territory residents in Australia on this issue.

All Australian residents, whether they live in a state or territory, should have an equal right to create their own legislation through democratic processes. The *Ensuring Northern Territory Rights Bill 2021* presents an opportunity to right this wrong for residents of the NT.

Humanists Australia supports amendments to the *Ensuring Northern Territory Rights Bill 2021* to extend rights to legislate for voluntary assisted dying to the ACT. However, should such amendments not be made, Humanists Australia supports the passage of the Bill in its present form.

Humanists Australia strongly believes in the intrinsic dignity of all human life. This includes the right for people to decide for themselves how they should best live their lives. **Human dignity should not be determined by what jurisdiction people live in.** It should be applied equally and fairly across all jurisdictions to allow people to live by their own personal values and that extends to allowing individuals to make their own decisions on end of life matters.

As the organisation representing humanists and non-religious people, Humanists Australia applies a humanist approach to assisted dying and end of life affairs. We believe that humanism is a democratic and ethical view of life, and that human beings have the right and responsibility to give meaning and shape to their own lives.

Furthermore, humanists believe that, as long as it does not result in harm to others, people should be free to make decisions about their own life. As non-religious people, humanists do not believe in god or deities. On attitudes such as death and dying, we do not share the view that the manner and time of death are for a deity to decide, and that interference with the course of nature is unacceptable.

Humanists strongly uphold the right to life but we believe that personal autonomy and individual choice is paramount when it comes to deciding end of life matters. Preventing a person from choosing a peaceful and humane option to end their lives when they are experiencing intolerable suffering undermines a person's right to human dignity and personal autonomy. Humanists Australia strongly believes that assisted dying should be made available to those who are incurably suffering, as long as they have made a clear decision, free from coercion, to end their lives. Strict safeguards must also, of course, be in place in any legislation to ensure that people considering voluntary assisted dying are safe and not vulnerable to harm through deliberate or accidental exploitation.

Humanists Australia supports the passage of the *Ensuring Northern Territory Rights Bill 2021*. All states and territories in Australia should have an equal right to create their own legislation. The people of the Territories deserve the right of human dignity.

30th August 2021