

Dear Senators,

Please accept the following as my submission to your Inquiry into the Criminal Code Amendment (Suicide Related Material Offences) Bill 2004.

Exit International holds introduction workshops in all states of Australia. Recent research has found our workshops to have a positive health effect on the well elderly who attend. This legislation threatens to abolish this workshop program.

The Ottawa Charter for Health Promotion 1986 of the World Health Organisation is based on three prerequisites: "advocate", "enable" and "mediate". Under the prerequisite "Enable" the following is stated:

This includes a secure foundation in a supportive environment, access to information, life skills and opportunities to make healthy choices. People cannot achieve their fullest health potential unless they are able to control those things that determine their health. This must apply equally to women and men.

The Exit workshop program is predicated upon these core principals of the new public health philosophy. This means that we are focused upon enabling our community through the provision of a supportive environment and access to important information. Our research shows that we are succeeding in these goals.

Firstly, a recent survey of over 309 Exit workshop participants has revealed that more than three quarters of workshop attendees (77%) attend in order to gain specific information about their end-of-life options. This same sample has reported the most useful topics covered by our workshops as:

- Information about drugs (85%)
- Exit's own inventions (84%)
- The current legal situation (83%).

So what is the effect of Exit workshops upon attendees? The vast majority of those attending (84%) have reported that workshop attendance has a positive effect on their lives. (The remainder report no effect.)

Not only is Exit providing the well, elderly (the median age of Exit members is 72 years) with access to reliable and accurate end-of-life information but our activities, as our membership has itself reported, are having an overall positive impact upon their quality of life.

The proposed legislation threatens to make our program a criminal activity. Those most penalised will be our members. This legislation denies vital information to this already often-overlooked group within our community (the well elderly). The greatest risk here is that without reliable and accurate

information, this group will be left with dangerous, violent and unreliable end-of-life options (the leading suicide method of "hanging" demeans us all).

Australia is, I remind you, a signatory to the WHO Declaration of Alma Ata. The proposed legislation will directly contravene our international obligations and penalize an entire generation within the Australian population who seek control and dignity in dying.

I would welcome the opportunity to talk to the finer points of this submission. I am available to appear before you at any time.

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Fiona Stewart', written in a cursive style.

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20 August 2004

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