

Voluntary assisted dying

Voluntary assisted dying in NSW – information for Aboriginal communities

This information talks about the sensitive issue of death and dying or Sorry Business as it may be known.

The end of life is an important time for Aboriginal people and their family, mob and community. People may have different views on death and dying, including voluntary assisted dying.

You may wish to talk to your loved ones and community to find out if this journey of dying is the right choice for you.

You can read information below about who is eligible for voluntary assisted dying, how to access it, talking to your mob, returning to Country, Sorry Business and support services.

NSW Health acknowledges the people of the many traditional countries and language groups of NSW. It acknowledges the wisdom of Elders past and present and pays respect to all Aboriginal communities of today.

End of life care

You, your doctor and other people involved in your care will work together to discuss your needs, hopes and preferences for your care into the future. This involves knowing what choices you have at your end of life.

Voluntary assisted dying may be one choice you have. If you choose voluntary assisted dying you will still be able to access other care you might need, including palliative care.

NSW's health care system will care for you whatever choice you make.

Learn more about palliative care: health.nsw.gov.au/palliativecare

The **Journey to Dreaming Toolkit** is available to guide Aboriginal people through end of life care. It incorporates storytelling, artwork, mindfulness and practical activities to help prepare for the end of life journey.

What is voluntary assisted dying?

Voluntary assisted dying means some people can ask a doctor for medical help to die.

It is not for everyone – you need to meet eligibility criteria and not everyone who is eligible will

choose it. It is your choice. You take or are given a medication which brings about your death at a time and place you choose.

Only a doctor who is approved and has done special training can give you the medication. Read more information below on doctors you can speak to.

Who can access voluntary assisted dying?

You can only access it in NSW if you:

- Have a sickness that will cause your death in less than 6 months or in 12 months if you have a neurodegenerative disease (cells in your central nervous system stop working or die)
- Have a sickness that causes you a lot of pain. This pain could be physical, psychological, social or emotional. Your doctor will talk to you to understand your level of pain and explain the options available to you to manage this pain
- Can make and communicate your own decisions throughout the whole process
- Want to get voluntary assisted dying. 'Voluntary' means it must be your choice
- Are 18 years of age or older
- Are an Australian citizen or a permanent resident of Australia or have lived in Australia for at least three years in a row
- Have lived in NSW for at least 12 months.

Having a mental illness or disability does not exclude somebody from accessing voluntary assisted dying if they meet all of the above criteria.

How do you access voluntary assisted dying?

Talk to a trusted health expert who will be able to help. This can be:

- Your doctor
- Aboriginal Medical Service practitioner
- Aboriginal Health Worker in your local health service.

Have lots of yarns to make sure you have the information you need to decide if you want to access voluntary assisted dying. Asking for information does not mean you have to do it.

Not all doctors in NSW will be involved.

Call the **NSW Voluntary Assisted Dying Care Navigator Service** (details below) if your doctor is not involved. They can help you find a doctor who can assist you with the journey of dying and answer your questions.

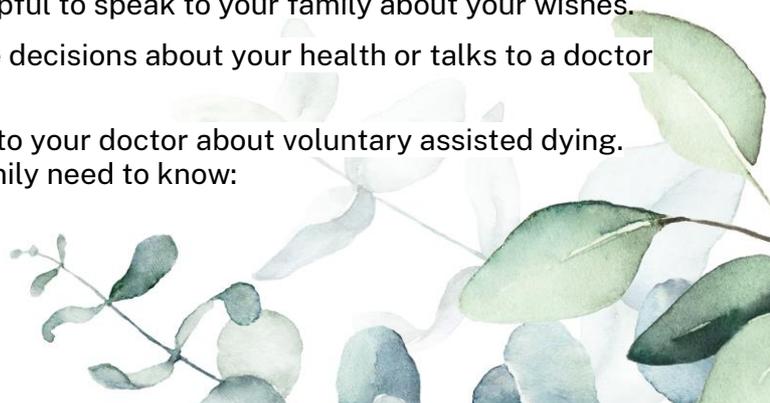
Talking to your mob

Some people may make decisions about death and dying together as a family. If you are thinking about voluntary assisted dying, you might find it helpful to speak to your family about your wishes.

This is important if someone usually helps you make decisions about your health or talks to a doctor on your behalf.

Your family and mob can be with you when you talk to your doctor about voluntary assisted dying. There are some rules however that you and your family need to know:

- Only you can ask for medical help to die
- Your mob cannot ask for it on your behalf



- No one can make you ask for it.

The reason your mob can't ask for it on your behalf is because of the law.

The law says steps and safeguards need to be followed. This makes sure you are not being pressured by another person. It also makes sure it is your choice.

Some people in your family may find it hard to understand your choice. It is important to remember that you can still access voluntary assisted dying even if those around you disagree with your choice.

People may have different views and it is important you have a yarn with someone you trust.

Dying on Country

Some Aboriginal people may wish to die on Country as part of their end of life journey.

The NSW law has special rules about where voluntary assisted dying can take place. You can choose to die at home surrounded by family and on Country, but your death needs to take place in NSW.

If you want to die on Country in regional or remote NSW, there may be support available. Talk to your doctor.

The voluntary assisted dying process finishes at the end of your life journey.

Your family and mob can follow traditional Sorry Business ceremonies and practices.

Other things to know

- **You can stop or pause the voluntary assisted dying process at any time. You do not need to give a reason**
- Even if you are prescribed or have received the medication, you do not need to take it
- It may take days, weeks or months before you make the final decision to take or be given the medication and this is okay
- The Isolated Patients Travel and Accommodation Assistance Scheme may provide financial assistance towards travel and accommodation costs.

Information and support about voluntary assisted dying

It is important you understand what is happening at each stage of the process. This is because you need to communicate your needs and decisions at each step. Have a yarn to your healthcare team or Aboriginal Medical Service.

You can also call the **NSW Voluntary Assisted Dying Care Navigator Service**.

They can support you and your mob to answer questions about voluntary assisted dying:

Call: **1300 802 133** Monday to Friday, 8:30am to 4.30pm (excluding public holidays)

Email: NSLHD-VADCareNavigator@health.nsw.gov.au

Mental health support

Talking about death and dying may be hard and sad.

Staying connected to culture is important. Share your culture and stories and reach out to your mob if you're not feeling your best.

Call these free services if you need mental health support:



- 13YARN on 13 92 76 – open 24 hours for crisis telephone support. Yarn with an Aboriginal or Torres Strait Islander Crisis Supporter
- Lifeline on 13 11 14 – open 24 hours for crisis telephone support
- Beyond Blue on 1300 22 4636 – open 24 hours for crisis telephone support
- Mental Health Line on 1800 011 511 – open 24 hours to connect you with NSW Health mental health services

More information

- Voluntary assisted dying: health.nsw.gov.au/vad
- Palliative care: health.nsw.gov.au/palliativecare
- End of life care planner: nsw.gov.au/planning-for-end-of-life

