

Here in Canberra we will have Voluntary Assisted Dying from late 2025 and I wish to pay tribute to the many individuals who have worked to bring this about.

Our eligibility conditions for VAD require a person to have an **advanced** medical condition which is causing intolerable suffering. A person's medical condition is considered **advanced** if their functioning and quality of life are declining and are not expected to improve; and any treatments reasonably acceptable to them have lost any benefit; and, crucially, that they are approaching the end of their life.

It is this last requirement that will cause problems for some of us. What exactly is meant by the term "approaching the end of life"? The Act only states that someone may be approaching the end of their life *even if it is uncertain whether their conditions will cause death within the next 12 months*.

The sad fact is that there are medical conditions which are advanced and progressively worsening but will not directly cause death in the short term.

Those conditions include Parkinson's disease, Motor Neurone disease, and Huntington's disease. In the severe stages of such illnesses you're basically bed-bound in a nursing home. You may have lost the ability to speak, have great difficulty swallowing, be unable to move, and be incontinent. This could go on for years, before you finally die.

I'm concerned that the term "*approaching the end of life*" will be interpreted conservatively by VAD medical professionals, meaning they may tend to fall back on 12 months as a rule of thumb. That could mean some people with neuro-degenerative diseases could suffer for extended periods, with no quality of life.

I have a neuro-degenerative illness which is currently manageable. The time may come however when I can no longer function as an autonomous individual, and at that point I would wish to end my life in a dignified manner.

However I doubt that the current VAD Act would be of help to me. I fear that I might have to spend years in care before I would be considered eligible for VAD under the current legislation.

So I believe our newly-legislated VAD laws should be extended, sooner rather than later, to provide for people who are not necessarily close to death but who are suffering terribly with no prospect of improvement, and who seek release.