

# Euthanasia

## ARPA Position Summary - 2017



Euthanasia is an intentional and direct act which has as its primary aim the extinction of life, usually the life of a person suffering from terminal illness. As Western Australia prepares to debate Euthanasia, the Association for Reformed Political Action (ARPA) strongly contends that legalising this practice in any form will be bad public policy for Western Australia and place vulnerable lives at risk. In saying this we do not deny the intense pain, horrific suffering and profound loss of dignity experienced by those who are suffering from a terminal illness.

ARPA's arguments include Bible-based reasons from a Reformed, Christian perspective. We believe these reasons are important to include, not only because they are held by the portion of the WA community we represent, but because the Bible has played an important role in influencing the formation of good laws and moral codes in civilised Western societies for hundreds of years.

Euthanasia was legalised briefly in the Northern Territory during 1996 but was overturned by the Federal Government. Since then all Australian states which have considered euthanasia bills have rejected them, with some states rejecting euthanasia multiple times. Euthanasia was most recently rejected in South Australia (November 2016) and Tasmania (June 2017). Western Australia last rejected euthanasia in 2010.

A fully-referenced research paper, explaining each of the arguments below, is available from ARPA by emailing [admin@arpa.com.au](mailto:admin@arpa.com.au)

### Biblical Reasons against Euthanasia

#### **Human life is sacred: murder is forbidden.**

Human beings are created in God's image, "fearfully and wonderfully made." (Ps 139). The Bible forbids murder. The weak and infirm are to be treated with dignity, honour and respect.

#### **Death is not the end of our existence.**

Because people have an eternal soul, death is not the end of existence but is a transition of the soul to eternal life. Hastening the death of an unbeliever may have tragic eternal consequences.

#### **The time of our death is appointed by God.**

Christians do not resist death at all costs and do not fear it. They often long to be with God in Heaven. However, Scripture states that God numbers our days and He decides the day of our death.

#### **We have no 'right' to decide the time and manner of our death.**

The notion that we should have full control over the timing and manner of our death is misplaced. None of us knows when our life may end and what the cause may be. Desiring to take control over death is symptomatic of rebellion against God. Euthanasia does not give control over death but gives in to it.

#### **Suffering is not futile**

Christians do not look for suffering but they recognise that it is one of the ways God works in peoples' lives, often drawing them closer to Him. During suffering Christians experience the care of the church, the nearness of God and they long for eternal life with no suffering. Suffering happens in many different ways throughout life and should never be escaped by suicide.

#### **There is no such thing as a 'good death.'**

Death by euthanasia may be painless but death itself can never be considered 'good.' Death only came into the world because of sin. It is the ultimate degradation of human life and is not redeemed in any way by assisted-suicide.

### Other Arguments Against Euthanasia

#### **Euthanasia is mostly sought for loss of autonomy and dignity, not unbearable pain.**

Statistics from jurisdictions where euthanasia is legal show that it is mainly sought for loss of autonomy, dignity and enjoyment in life rather than pain.

**Palliative care already allows for dignity in death.**

Effective palliative care already alleviates the pain associated with the dying process. It provides dignity during death and should be better resourced. When provided with quality palliative care, less than 1% of people desire assisted suicide.

**Euthanasia safeguards are open to interpretation and cannot guarantee that innocent people will not be killed.**

The death of innocent people is a risk that cannot be eliminated. Safeguards depend on definitions which can be subjective. Overseas examples show that euthanasia safeguards usually fail and that penalties for breaches are rarely enforced.

**Euthanasia does not guarantee a painless death.**

Complications, including comas and a failure to die, have occurred during euthanasia procedures, causing patients to suffer horribly.

**Suicide rates will not be lowered and may even increase.**

Euthanasia in US states has not inhibited non-assisted suicide rates, which have increased in jurisdictions which allow euthanasia. Euthanasia may legitimise suicide as an acceptable response to suffering.

**Euthanasia cheapens the 'value' of life by linking it to a subjective 'quality' of life.**

Legalised euthanasia requires judgements to be made about which lives may and may not be terminated. Value of life should be absolute and never determined by a person's ability or 'benefit' to society.

**A right to die can easily become a duty to die.**

Vulnerable people groups, including the terminally-ill, could feel they have a duty to die, especially if it is presented to them by doctors as an option.

**Euthanasia has dire implications for the safety of the elderly.**

Elder-abuse is an emerging problem and elderly people, who are already vulnerable to abuse, could be pressured or manipulated into requesting euthanasia for financial gain.

**Euthanasia is contrary to medical ethics.**

Both Australian and British medical associations are opposed to euthanasia. Euthanasia creates the potential for distrust and conflicts of interest when suicide is cheaper than further treatment or palliative care.

**Legalised euthanasia in any form will lead to calls for its expansion.**

Euthanasia has increased in scope in every other jurisdiction where it has been legalised. In Europe, former supporters are alarmed at how a measure which was initially legalised as an option of last resort is now demanded as a right. Australian advocates are already on record saying they would prefer more open access to euthanasia than the current models they are publicly supporting.

**Pro-euthanasia advocates do not have the monopoly on compelling stories.**

Compelling personal stories feature heavily in pro-euthanasia arguments, but equally powerful stories of suffering can be used to illustrate the dangers of euthanasia. In 2016 a story emerged from the Netherlands of an elderly woman with dementia who was held down by her family while resisting the administration of a lethal injection.

**Legalising Euthanasia leads to other ethical issues needing to be resolved.**

Once it is legalised, euthanasia will require other ethical decisions to be made. Issues to be resolved include the matter of organ donation (euthanasia patients make for desirable organ donors) and conscientious objectors, including medical staff.

**About us:** ARPA Australia is a non-partisan Christian organisation affiliated with the Free Reformed Churches of Australia, a denomination with over 4000 members across 16 congregations. ARPA provides advice and leadership to its grassroots supporters, informing them of current social and political issues and stimulating them to engage democratically as active and informed citizens in the public sphere. ARPA also encourages parliamentarians to maintain and promote the Christian foundations of Australian society. Whilst we affirm that church and state must be institutionally separate, we firmly believe that the Bible provides the best moral foundation for a just, caring and sustainable civil society. Our members are drawn from the Free Reformed Churches of Australia. Doctrinally, Reformed Christians trace their roots back to the Protestant Reformation in the sixteenth century. They believe the Bible to be the infallible word of God and subscribe to the Apostles Creed, the Nicene Creed and the Athanasian Creed as true summaries of the Christian Faith. For more information about the Free Reformed Churches of Australia visit <http://frca.org.au/churches.cgi>