

29<sup>th</sup> July 2019

Ms Leslie Guy  
The Secretary  
End of Life Choices Committee  
C/- Parliament House  
GPO Box 572  
ADELAIDE SA 5001

[jcendoflifechoices@parliament.sa.gov.au](mailto:jcendoflifechoices@parliament.sa.gov.au)

Dear Ms Guy

COTA SA welcomes the formation of the End of Life Choices Joint Committee by the South Australian Parliament.

In 2018 the COTA Federation undertook a comprehensive survey of older people throughout Australia, the first of its kind and the beginning of a periodic survey of older Australians. Significantly the vast majority (84%) of survey participants indicated that they supported the introduction of voluntary assisted dying in their state or territory provided the right protections and legislation were in place. This national result was consistent across Australia, including in our state. Of note, while the survey found variations in the support between age groups of older people and between religious affiliations, in all segments there was a significant majority of support for assisted dying legislation.

These findings mirror the general tenor of communications with us from older people, the majority of whom have urged for many years consideration of such legislation.

COTA SA represents the rights, interests and aspirations of 633,000 older South Australians and was established in 1957. We are in frequent contact with a wide variety of older South Australians on a wide range of issues. Central to their active ageing is the desire to retain control of their lives and have choices that enable them to live and age well. Fear of declining health and lack of access to appropriate care are frequent concerns.

Beyond this survey data and the usual conversations and communication, regretfully we are not in a position currently to provide more specific views on voluntary assisted dying.

However, we did ask our Policy Council, a formally constituted group of older people representing the diversity of older South Australians, to provide initial advice to the COTA SA Board and to the Joint Committee.

Their advice, because we have not been in a position to consult more broadly, reflects some very important principles which should underpin the inquiry. These include -

- An acknowledgement that there would appear to be overwhelming support for voluntary assisted dying legislation among older South Australians;

- That any legislation must reflect the primacy of self-determination and choice, respecting each person's wishes, ensuring that people are heard, and that everyone has the right support to enable them to die well whatever that means for them;
- That we must increase the promotion and support available to older people to complete and use Advance Care Directives (ACD) as the pre-eminent mechanism for directing choices in the process of dying.

The Policy Council is also supportive of the framing core values for end of life care nominated by the Parliament of Victoria in its report *viz* -

- Every human life has value
- Open discussion about death and dying should be encouraged and promoted
- People should be able to make informed choices about the end of their life
- End of life care should be person centred
- End of life care should address the needs of families and carers
- Pain and suffering should be alleviated for those who are dying
- Palliative care is an invaluable, life enhancing part of end of life care
- High quality end of life care should be available to all people in all settings
- Each person should be entitled to core rights in end of life care
- Vulnerable people should be supported and protected
- The law should be coherent and transparent, followed and enforced.

We know there is a high price that individuals pay for the lack of options for voluntary assisted dying at the moment and our Policy Council particularly made the point that we know very little about the prevalence of suicide and self-harm among older people who believe they have no other options.

COTA SA believes we could assist the Committee and the development of any subsequent legislation through the facilitation of open discussions with larger numbers of people about what they anticipate, what they worry about and what good legislation must include. Our own social enterprise, The Plug-in, is in a good position to facilitate thoughtful inclusive co-design including with frail older people. While this would require resourcing, COTA colleagues in other states have made significant contributions as a result of such processes.

We commend the Committee for its deliberations and would be happy to contribute further as needed.

Yours sincerely

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

**Jane Mussared**  
**Chief Executive**