

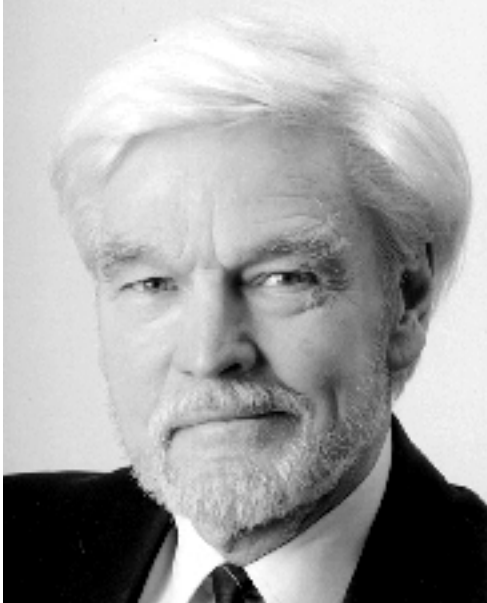
# Dying With Dignity

November 2006  
No. 136

Published by Dying With Dignity Victoria Inc.  
Promoting the right to choose

# UPDATE

Reg No: A0006974B



The Victorian State election will be held this 25th November.

Labor has consistently stated it has no plans to do anything about voluntary euthanasia legislation: reform that the overwhelming majority of Victorians have wanted for at least 25 years.

The Liberals have no formal policy on voluntary euthanasia at the time of writing, although the Parliamentary leader Ted Baillieu has publicly voiced his personal support for reform.

Nationals leader Peter Ryan states that his MPs would be allowed a conscience vote.

DWDV as an organisation does not align itself with any political party.

Your committee works with all Victorian politicians and candidates who support the cause of dying with dignity, especially those candidates who commit to introducing a private member's bill (PMB) to enact law reform.

While such a bill wouldn't be guaranteed success in its first passage (no bill is), at the very least it will stimulate debate in the Victorian Parliament for the first time. And if the Parliamentary membership is representative of Victorians as a whole, then such a bill could indeed succeed on its first passage.

Leading up to the election we have been in discussion with most of the parties and at this stage the most likely source of progress on the legislative front is from the Greens. Most of the Greens upper house candidates have enthusiastically endorsed our Legislative Charter and indicated strong support.

Recent changes to the electoral system make it likely that one or more Greens will be elected to the upper house (Legislative Council). There is also a possibility that Greens could win the lower house (Legislative Assembly) seats of Melbourne (currently held by the Minister for Health, Browyn Pike with a margin of just 1.93% over the Greens) and Richmond (held by Cabinet Secretary Richard Wynne with a margin of 3.1%).

We have been keeping records of politicians' responses to supporters' polling for support of the

DWDV legislative charter, and to date have support from selected members of Labor, Liberal, Nationals and Greens.

We already have a list of supporting politicians and candidates on our web site

([www.dwdv.org.au](http://www.dwdv.org.au))

and will shortly be publishing full political maps of Victoria, colour-coded by support, to help you make informed decisions.

What will help make a real difference is your active support. Helping a supportive candidate by handing out how to vote cards on polling day can make a vital difference.

I encourage you to be as active as you are able during the election. It is only *action* that is likely to change the situation. Leaving the work to others is a recipe for retaining the status quo. Most political parties are short of help with handing out how to vote cards, which can make a crucial difference, especially in marginal electorates.

Please do check with DWDV or online to see which candidates are supporting our cause, and decide if you can help.

Either contact your preferred party head office directly to offer your support, or you can contact Rowena in the office and let her know which party or parties whose candidates you would be willing to help. We'll keep you posted a little closer to the election and see if we can match you up with a candidate who deserves your help and who you may be willing to support.

These are exciting times. A small part of the outcome is in the hands of each one of us, so action is vital.

*Rodney Syme*

From the President...

**PATRONS:** Sir John Holland  
Sir Peter Derham  
Mr Julian Burnside QC  
**PRESIDENT:** Dr Rodney Syme  
**V. PRESIDENT:** Mr Neil Francis  
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My fellow committee members and I are proud to be serving DWDV members and the wider Victorian community. We work hard to hear your views, provide the support you ask for, and work towards legislative reform that will one day help terminally ill Victorians have the peace of mind and legal authority to determine the time, place and manner of their own death.

Advances in modern medicine have meant that many formerly fatal illnesses can be successfully treated, and that is wonderful.

An unfortunate corollary is that it is possible to keep terminally and hopelessly ill people physically alive far beyond their wishes; creating great suffering. The incidence of this is increasing too, as the majority of Victorians now die in hospital rather than peacefully in their own homes as they used to. This increases the likelihood of "over-intervention" against the sufferer's wishes.

We respect the right of all individuals to hold their own views on end-of-life issues, but let's be clear; the anti-choice lobby does not have exclusive dibs on "morality", nor any right to force others to comply with their beliefs against their will.

Unlike us, those opposed are amply funded and have powerful backing, even though they represent the views of a minority (just 19%) of Victorians on end-of-life issues. Some are scared of the opposition, though there is no need to be.

We will only achieve change by being vocal and active ourselves.

To this end, I encourage you to talk to your friends, relatives, colleagues and anyone else about the current lack of end-of-life choices, and how that forces people to either suffer terribly or take their own lives by undignified and violent means. We wish this were not so, but this is what actually happens.

Please take every opportunity to encourage people you know to join DWDV as members. If on average, each current member encourages just one other person to join, we will have doubled our membership. Given that 73% or more of Victorians support the cause you may know several people who would join DWDV.

New members will be in good company; we have thousands of members already—but we need many more in order to be as effective as we can.

I commend to you encouraging others to join, knowing they will be supporting a cause that the overwhelming majority of Victorians have wanted for so long. If you need extra membership application forms, just call Rowena in the office and she'll post some out to you. Alternatively, new members can join online via our website ([www.dwdv.org.au](http://www.dwdv.org.au)).

*Neil Francis*



## Farewell to Coral Candy

"Our mother and grandmother, Coral Candy, passed away on 6th July 2006 after 10 years living with dementia.

Coral joined the then VESV in 1987 and was a staunch advocate of Voluntary Euthanasia right throughout her life. Of those who attended her memorial service, the common thread in their memories was her passion in favour of people's right to choose when they ended their life. She was adamant that she should be entitled to die with dignity of her own free will should she ever be struck down with an incurable illness that affected her quality of life.

It was therefore with great sorrow that we witnessed her progression through dementia. As you are no

doubt aware, the disease truly deprives people of any semblance of life in the worst possible manner.

Coral was a vibrant, intelligent woman and it was extremely distressing to watch her decline, particularly with the knowledge that this was the last thing she of all people would have wanted.

Thus as a tribute in honour of her life, we requested that people make donations to DWDV instead of presenting flowers. It is our great hope that one day Australians (and everyone around the world) will have the right to choose when they end their life so they and their families will be spared the terrible suffering and loss of enjoyment that accompanies so

many tragic illnesses.

We wish DWDV all the best in their endeavours to make this a reality."

*Lynne and Joanna Soucek*

The committee was very touched and highly appreciative of the thoughtfulness of the Soucek family. It stands as a shining example—of being proactive to support the cause—to all members and supporters to help achieve the change Australians have wanted for so long.

If you would like to follow the Soucek's example, simply speak with your funeral director to make the necessary arrangements.

They know how to accommodate such a request.

# From near and far

## Western Australia Endorses Advance Healthcare Directives—Victoria Doesn't

In July this year, the WA Labor Government introduced legislation that was similar to the Victorian Medical Treatment Act, allowing for the refusal of treatment and for the appointment of an Enduring Medical Power of Attorney.

Importantly, it went further, allowing for the legal creation of an Advance Healthcare Directive (AD). It was passed in August after a conscience vote.

It is the most complete and advanced health care planning legislation in Australia and is an exciting development. It has been strongly supported by Palliative Care WA, and given qualified support by the AMA.

Hopefully this legislation will act as a spur to the Victorian Government to amend our own Medical Treatment Act to formalise and protect Advance Healthcare Directives in our own State. (ADs operate under common law in Victoria and are not protected by statutory law.)

DWDV has been lobbying strongly for this change for more than five years, and Victorian Labor's own Health Policy Committee has unanimously supported such change for two years.

Yet the Government has steadfastly failed to act.

Perhaps it is time for you to write to your Parliamentary members (one lower house and two upper house) to indicate your disappointment and frustration at the Government's inaction. You can identify your own three representatives simply by typing your home street address into our web site ([www.dwdv.org.au/ContactYourPolitician.html](http://www.dwdv.org.au/ContactYourPolitician.html)).

If you're not on the 'net and don't know who your representatives are, call Rowena in the office and she will look them up for you.

Remember, if politicians don't hear from you, they'll assume you don't care.

This is your chance to make a difference.

## DWDV General Advance Healthcare Directive Revised

We've recently revised our General Advance Healthcare Directive (AD) to make it easier to understand, and to minimise the possibility of mistakes in its completion. This does not mean that your previous AD is now invalid. If completed correctly, it remains effective.

We made the change because we became aware that some people were filling in the choice boxes incorrectly, and were actually requesting treatment that they almost certainly did not want.

We recommend you review your Advance Directive, as you may have accidentally chosen options you DON'T want

Because we believe in choice, the boxes are included to allow for various options and to make the document universal—that is, it could be used equally well by someone who wanted all possible treatment as someone who wanted none.

The old version needed careful reading to ensure that the correct choices had been made. If you have completed the previous general AD, then we encourage you to re-examine it and ensure that it fulfils your wishes. If you are unsure, get someone to help you.

The revised AD is now available on our website ([www.dwdv.org.au](http://www.dwdv.org.au)) and free of charge to members via our office. (There is a small charge for non-members to recover costs.) It is greatly simplified and much easier to follow. There is even an example completed AD as well, so you can see what filling in each section looks like in practise.

## Melbourne University Seminar

In the previous Update we encouraged members to attend the Advance Directive seminar hosted by Melbourne University. And what a terrific seminar it was. The University was inundated with guests and had to videoconference the seminar into a second lecture theatre as some 600 people attended, showing how important this topic is to Victorians.

The seminar provided a range of views on advance directives, with some thought-provoking presentations by various speakers. While we don't have space to mention all the speakers, Max Charlesworth afforded us a very entertaining and informative view on ethical considerations, while Dr Bill Silvester gave an excellent overview of the consultation process he has introduced at the Austin Hospital.

The event was rounded off with a fascinating "hypothetical" case study. You can listen to the seminar at <http://www.mdhs.unimelb.edu.au/news/deanslecture/21jul06.html>.

We congratulate and thank Melbourne University for hosting this excellent event.

## From the College of Surgeons Committee—OBFUSCATION

DWDV wrote to the Royal Australasian College of Surgeons seeking their support for our Legislative Charter, which has already been endorsed by the Doctor's Reform Society of Australia, the Australian Nurses Federation (Victorian Branch), the Victorian AIDS council, the Victorian Council for Civil Liberties, the Humanist Society of Victoria, and a number of members of the Victorian Parliament.

We have received the following reply from the Chair of the College's Victorian State Committee.

"While I am sure that many Fellows would agree with the sentiments and ideas put forward in the Charter, there is obviously a wide diversity of opinion within the college, and some Fellows would have differing views as you well know.

Unfortunately, therefore, the Victorian State Committee does not have the appropriate authority to support your request for endorsement of your legislative Charter."

*Continued Next Page...*

This is a curious response indeed. The point of a committee is to consult with its members (or at least a panel) on their views, debate the issues and reach a majority position or decision.

Is the College's Committee suggesting that it can't reach a position on behalf of its members when there is a range of views?

There would be a diverse range of opinions on every matter before a committee. If such a range were to automatically preclude the committee from reaching a position, it would render the committee entirely useless and irrelevant.

DWDV would be pleased if the College's Committee would further consider potential support for our Legislative Charter and return with a statement of a real position on behalf of its members.

### Visits to Dignitas by UK Citizens

In the last five years at least 50 relatives and friends have escorted the dying from the UK to Zurich—to the Dignitas apartment for an assisted suicide. Most of these "escorts" are known to the UK police, and many have been questioned by the police on their return but until last May none had been arrested.

Then Stefan Sliwinski was arrested for having helped his mother, terminally ill with cancer, to get to Zurich. After much consideration by the English legal authorities, it was decided that no further action would be taken.

It is becoming increasingly likely, though not certain unless there is a defining court case, that these

actions are not in breach of the law. Simply being present or rendering humane assistance is not a crime.

It is almost equally certain that this is the case in Australia.

### Significant SBS Documentary

SBS television has commissioned a film about dying with dignity, titled "Do Not Resuscitate", and for the past two years DWDV has been working with the film maker. It is now nearly complete and is expected to be aired on SBS later this year, in two episodes.

Expected airing dates are Thursday 23rd and 30th November at 8:30pm. (That is, the first episode is before the election, and the second one is after.) Check your TV guide for details closer to the date.

Steve Guest, who appeared so prominently on Jon Faine's programme (774ABC), is a central figure. One of our active members, Mary Walsh, also features in the documentary.

The film is likely to have a significant impact on the dying with dignity debate, and we encourage all supporters to keep an eye out for it. We will alert our email members electronically if the airing dates change, so if we don't have your email address yet or you've changed yours, please let Rowena know straight away.

The documentary will be a good opportunity to write letters to your newspaper editors, and it is likely that Jon Faine will revisit the matter and would welcome your calls.

### DWDV Individual Counselling

We recently received this letter from a member who received individual counselling. It's been slightly edited to preserve confidentiality.

"Thank you for the two occasions when you gave me invaluable assistance and advice during the illness of my late husband.

Following your first lot of telephone advice I felt confident enough to carry out a dialogue with my husband about what he wanted to do when his condition deteriorated and what should happen to his possessions. I was able especially to make him think about the latter and write down his wishes.

In the second instance, you kindly came to the house within a short time of me telephoning. What a difference it made to have someone with expertise and communication skills actually sitting down and spending time talking to my husband and going through the important issues! Something which had been essentially overlooked by his doctor.

The time you spent afterwards with my son was also important and of great comfort to him.

My husband died peacefully a few days later and I am convinced that your help and support contributed to this.

Many thanks; my family and I will be eternally grateful for the support and enlightenment you provided during those last days." Do remember that DWDV does provide individual counselling about end of life issues.

This counselling is available free to members.

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## Help Wanted!

Your committee and volunteers work tirelessly in the support of members as well as the wider Victorian community, and towards legislative reform.

Sometimes however, we struggle to accomplish all the tasks we would like to, or at least to the standard we would like—due to a shortage of willing hands and expertise.

This sometimes limits our effectiveness.

If you aren't already a volunteer with DWDV, the committee asks you to consider donating a little of your time or expertise to help the cause.

Please contact Rowena if you feel you may have something to contribute.

At the moment we are especially looking for people with:

- Writing ability, who can join our writing group, monitor their local newspapers and compose letters to the editor when VE issues arise.
- Artistic skills, who can draw, paint, design, compose, or lay out material in a professional and appealing way.

If you think you may be able to help in any way, do call Rowena in the office right away.

We'd love to hear from you.

# Please Do Not Resuscitate

A member recently composed this moving message. "Please do not call an ambulance – call my doctor, Dr [Doctor's Name] at [Phone Number], who knows my wishes about dying.

No hospitals, no life support system just enough pain killing drugs to ease the exit.

I have taken an overdose of drugs deliberately to end a life that has gone on too long.

Polymyalgia and osteoporosis have made it impossible to move without pain.

Painkillers give only temporary relief and it is distressing to wake each morning aching in every muscle and bone.

I am afraid I will wake one morning unable to move at all and then be carted off to some "home" where I might linger for years. I must go with some dignity before I become

completely incapable.

Surely nobody could begrudge me peace after years of immobility and pain.

Be assured I am in a rational state of mind and longing for an undisturbed and everlasting sleep. I have had a very good life – no regrets, and I thank my friends and relatives who have done so much to make it enjoyable.

No need for names—you know."

*\*We applaud the intentions expressed in this note.*

*However, you should be aware that attempting suicide by drug overdose is often unsuccessful and can lead to a poor outcome.*

*Should you be considering end-of-life options, call the office to arrange individual counselling or book in to attend one of our workshops.*

*DWDV supports medically assisted dying, but not suicide per se.*

## Petition signature collection still going strong!

Congratulations to all those members who've been busy collecting petition signatures. Indeed some have turned in truly amazing efforts and we salute you.

We now have thousands of signatures: but the job's not done yet! We need many more. Your committee is planning to have the petition presented to the newly elected Victorian Parliament in the New Year.

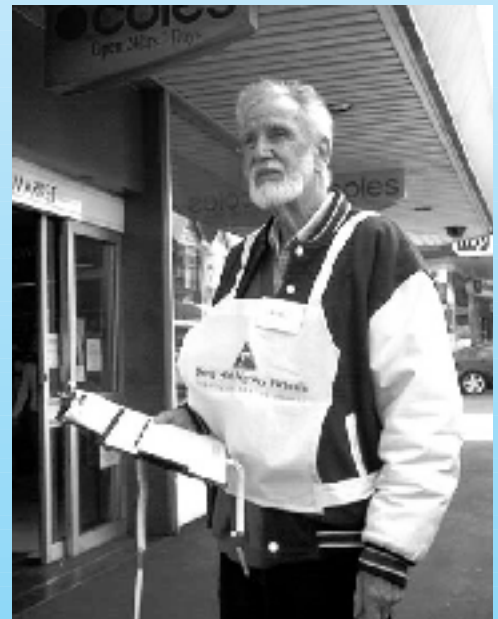
Members take different approaches to collecting signatures. Some simply leave the petition form lying around on the kitchen bench or the coffee table in the lounge room (or at work, but get permission first). It invites the curiosity of visitors, and a great many willingly sign.

Others are happy to actively collect signatures while out and about. You could collect signatures outside your local shopping centre, at the train station, or in a public space such as a busy park.

There is even an opportunity to collect signatures of many Victorians at the coming State election on November 25th—as they vote. Provided you stand 20 metres or more from the polling booth entrance (or further if the Booth Officer directs you), you can collect signatures from the public as they arrive at or leave the polling station.

We recommend adopting a roving (on foot) rather than a fixed presence (e.g. card table). Also, you may need permission to be present on grounds such as a school yard, rather than the public street. (You have every right to collect in the street.)

This is a terrific opportunity to collect many more signatures in support of DWDV and its Legislative Charter.



**Alf Clark collects petition signatures outside his local supermarket.**

## November Workshop Bookings Now Open

**Bookings are now invited for the DWDV Workshop to be held on the 20th November 2006.**

At the Workshop you receive a set of DWDV's documents to help specify your own end of life wishes.

You will also experience two and a half hours of expert tuition in how the current law applies to you, as well as how to complete, witness and store the DWDV documents properly to maximise your protection, or the protection of your loved ones.

The atmosphere is friendly and informal and light refreshments are served.

Available Workshop places always fill up fast, so make sure to get in early for the November workshop if you'd like to attend. It will almost certainly be the last one for 2006.

Prices: Members Pensioner \$20,  
Non-Pensioner \$40;  
Non-Members Pensioner \$40,  
Non-Pensioner \$80.

# Member raises awareness of the Death With Dignity issue in the wider community

The article below, "Death With Dignity", expresses views both familiar to and passionately supported by DWDV members.

The difference is that one member managed to get them published in his local newspaper, hopefully raising awareness and stimulating wider community debate.

David Milan was aware that his regional paper, "The

Post: Albury Wodonga", carried a weekly "Reflections" column which was usually dominated by contributions from church/religious groups.

So he wrote and submitted this, which was accepted and printed.

David says many rural newspapers have similar columns and they are open to (perhaps even reliant on) reader input and that this fact represents wonderful awareness-raising opportunities.

He's probably right about rural papers...but when I checked my own urban (Melbourne eastern suburbs) local, there was a similar column!

I shall be submitting a piece on the Dying With Dignity issue ASAP.

\*If other DWDV members have the opportunity and incentive to do likewise in their community...go for it.

If you are diffident about your writing ability, do it anyway. A DWDV member who is a professional editor will be happy to polish your piece before you submit it.

Telephone Rowena at the office for details.

*Shirley Clifford, Ed.*

## DEATH WITH DIGNITY

The vexed "Right to Die" debate stirs great passion and almost everyone has an opinion to offer. Virtually nobody is simply apathetic. What *is* curious is that a subject so personal and private should be in the public domain at all, for surely the right to end one's life, to seek deliverance from unbearable suffering, is a straightforward matter of individual conscience.

People opposing medically-assisted suicide on moral grounds need have no part of it. Others who have no such objection should be free to choose differently.

A simple case of "my life - my choice".

Public polling consistently reveals significant majority support for the principal of the right to die. Access to a death with peace and dignity is, surely, everyone's wish. There are of course, sincere opponents who, using the "slippery slope" argument, claim that to legalise voluntary euthanasia would lead inevitably to a rash of untimely deaths as avaricious relatives in cahoots with mercenary medicos pressure frail elderlies to end it all.

Overseas experience (e.g. Holland, Switzerland and Oregon) disproves this alarmist prediction completely and the number of people seeking legal medically-assisted

suicide in those places has been statistically insignificant.

We all, it seems, cling tenaciously to life and will only relinquish it when the little quality remaining comes to be far outweighed by the misery involved in extending existence beyond any useful purpose.

The ludicrous paradox is that while suicide per se is NOT illegal, to help a loved one who desperately wants to take this step, however compelling and compassionate the grounds, however pitiful the pleas for deliverance, turns the helper into a criminal.

Ours is a diverse society. Some, driven by religious conviction, remain implacably opposed to legalising medically assisted suicide.

They have every right to their opinion and I would never seek to impose my contrary view upon them.

Is it so unreasonable to expect that tolerance to be reciprocated?

"My life - my choice" ought to be a principle endorsed by everyone.

*David Milan*

## Poor Boris is on his last legs!

Sadly, Boris, our second office computer, has reached the age of ten. That's the equivalent of 120 human years.

He's getting quite cantankerous and dementia is setting in fast. Boris has signed one of DWDV's Advance Healthcare Directives, so we'll have to let him go to the big computer graveyard in the sky very soon.

Your committee wonders if you may have a spare computer that would love to take Boris' place and continue to serve a very worthy cause.

If you have one you think might be willing, please send a note to Rowena at [dwdv@dwdv.org.au](mailto:dwdv@dwdv.org.au) and let her know roughly its specifications (e.g. memory, version of Windows).

She can then determine if it's going to be compatible with the rest of our office system.

