

Position Statement

Voluntary Assisted Dying

Jewish Care has one clear vision: **Together, building and supporting a healthy, resilient, and inclusive Jewish community.** Our values are universal and enduring in nature, but are also particular to the Jewish approach to creating a meaningful life, and a strong, cohesive community.

Our foundational values define who we are and underpin everything we do. The values, **Respect** (*derech erez*), **Community** (*kehilla*), **Inclusion** (*hachlala*) and **Social Responsibility** (*achrayoot chevratit*), are about people - they provide a moral compass for the way we respond to challenges and the decisions we make.

These values pervade every aspect of Jewish Care, informing relationships between colleagues, staff and clients, and our organisation and the wider community.

The Board of Jewish Care seeks to demonstrate our commitment to these values by clearly stating Jewish Care's position on important issues that are contextual to the Jewish community's rich history, and because it frames the way we will conduct ourselves and our engagement with members of the community.

Preface

In 2017, Victoria became the first Australian state to legalise 'physician assisted' suicide or 'euthanasia' through the implementation of the *Voluntary Assisted Dying Act (the Act) 2017 (Vic)* in force from 19 June 2019. The Act provides for a competent individual over the age of 18 and who meets the strict criteria outlined in the Act, through engagement with a Medical Practitioner and Specialist Practitioner to be referred to the Voluntary Assisted Dying Review Board. The Board will then determine if the individual, meeting the criteria, will be provided access to a prescribed agent for the sole purpose of ending their life.

Organisations, under the Act, are required to determine the level in which they will aid and support an individual who seeks to access the Voluntary Assisted Dying pathway. The minimum, legally compliant, role an organisation must take is to ensure a person has access to information, if requested, and is referred to the statewide resources available to assist with their inquiry.

דרך ארץ
derech erez
respect

קהילה
kehilla
community

הכללה
hachlala
inclusion

אחריות חברתית
achrayoot chevratit
social responsibility

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As an organisation, Jewish Care is committed to upholding a fundamental tenet of Judaism that all human life is sacred. The Torah account of the creation of Adam and Eve, both “*in the Divine image*” (Genesis 1:26 – 27), introduces the idea that human life is of inestimable value, and that no one life is more or less valuable than another.

As a Jewish organisation, we uphold a tradition that places great emphasis on human dignity and the sanctity of life. Consequently, our model of support for our Elders and clients aims to preserve life, as comfortably as possible, and for as long as possible. Because we recognise that individuals and those important in their life face agonising challenges when dealing with terminal and debilitating illnesses, we endeavour to provide holistic end-of-life palliative care, inclusive of empathic pastoral support, to sustain Elders and clients along with the important people in their life during a difficult time.

Equally, Jewish Care supports the values of an individual and their ability to exercise self-determination and their right to informed and autonomous decision-making.

Therefore, in accordance with these values, and the Act, Jewish Care will:

- Provide holistic, comprehensive end-of-life care and support, which meets the physical, spiritual, psychological, and social needs of the Elder/client and those important in their life, including existential distress, with the goal of reducing suffering.
- Empower the Elder/client to actively participate in all decision-making regarding their care and support and respect their self-determination using advance care planning, also recognising the role of substitute decision-makers/medical treatment decision-makers and any other agents acting on behalf of the Elder/client.
- Ensure any Elder/client who requests information about Voluntary Assisted Dying is provided information regarding this Position Statement and where to find more information outside of Jewish Care.
- Not require any staff member or volunteer be involved in assisting an Elder/client with any actions associated with taking of the prescribed agent.

Definitions

Physician assisted suicide - the intentional giving of assistance, by a medical practitioner, to assist a person to die.

Euthanasia - the intentional bringing about of the death of a person in order to relieve suffering. It can be either voluntary or non-voluntary.

Voluntary Assisted Dying – the term used to describe euthanasia and physician assisted suicide in the Voluntary Assisted Dying Act 2017 (Vic).

Palliative Care – an approach that improves the quality of life of a person, and those important in their life, facing problems associated with life-threatening illness, through the prevention and relief of suffering by means of early identification and impeccable assessment and treatment of pain and other problems, physical, psychosocial, and spiritual.

End of Life Care - includes physical, spiritual, and psychosocial assessment, and care and treatment delivered by health professionals and ancillary staff. It also includes support of those important in the person’s life, and care of the person’s body after their death.

This Position Statement was accepted April, 2019 and will be reviewed in April, 2020.