

Being a witness for practitioner administration

Voluntary assisted dying

If a person makes a practitioner administration decision, they need to choose a witness.

If you have been asked and agreed to be a witness for practitioner administration, you will have responsibilities under the *Voluntary Assisted Dying Act 2021* (the Act).

The witness for practitioner administration has an important role. You should think carefully about whether you believe you will be able to manage the responsibility. This will include being present when the voluntary assisted dying substance is administered by the administering doctor or nurse. The administration of the substance to the person will result in their death.

Eligibility

To be a witness you must be 18 years or older.

You can be:

- a partner or spouse of the person
- a family member of the person
- a friend of the person
- a carer of the person
- the person's voluntary assisted dying contact person
- a healthcare worker involved in the care of the person
- someone the person trusts to take on the role.

Role of the witness

The purpose of a witness to practitioner administration is to provide a safeguard to ensure the:

- person's request for voluntary assisted dying is voluntary
- person is not being pressured into accessing voluntary assisted dying by someone else.

You will need to fill in the witness section of the *Practitioner Administration Form*. This form is for the administering doctor or nurse to make a record of the administration of the voluntary assisted dying substance. This form is completed after the person has died.

You will need to certify in the form that:

- the person appeared to be acting voluntarily and without coercion
- you were present when the doctor or nurse administered the substance to the person.

Voluntarily and without coercion

In deciding if you believe the person is acting voluntarily and without coercion, you may want to have a conversation with the person about their decision. You should approach this conversation sensitively.

You should think about whether you believe it is the person's own choice to access voluntary assisted dying. Things to look out for can include:

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- the person does not understand voluntary assisted dying or why they are accessing it
- the person is accessing voluntary assisted dying because they feel like a burden to family
- the person keeps changing their mind on why they are accessing voluntary assisted dying
- the person always looks to someone else—a friend, family, or carer to answer questions for them
- another person talking over the top of the person accessing voluntary assisted dying.

You should talk to the administering doctor or nurse, if you are concerned that the person is:

- not acting voluntarily, or
- being pressured into accessing voluntary assisted dying.

Note: The administering doctor or nurse must also certify that they were satisfied the person was acting voluntarily and without coercion. The administering doctor or nurse will also confirm if the person has decision-making capacity. The administering doctor or nurse does will not administer the substance if they:

- do not believe the person is acting voluntarily or without coercion, or
- believe the person has lost capacity.

Present during administration

You will need to be present when the doctor or nurse administers the voluntary assisted dying substance to the person.

Change of witness

You can choose not to be a witness for practitioner administration for any reason.

You should tell the person that you no longer want to be the witness, but you do not have to tell them why.

The person accessing voluntary assisted dying can also change their mind about whether they want you to be their witness for practitioner administration. They should tell you they have changed their mind.

You do not need to fill out any forms to stop being a witness for practitioner administration.

Legal protections

Under the Act, if a person dies by having a doctor or nurse administer a voluntary assisted dying substance, they are not considered to have died by suicide. There are specific protections in the Act for people who assist a person accessing voluntary assisted dying or are present when the person dies.

This means you will not be breaking any laws in Queensland by carrying out your responsibilities as a witness for practitioner administration.

QVAD-Support

QVAD-Support provides advice about voluntary assisted dying.

QVAD-Support is run by care coordinators who are medical, nursing, and allied healthcare workers. You can contact QVAD-Support if you have any questions about your role as a witness for practitioner administration or voluntary assisted dying.

You can talk to a care coordinator Monday to Friday, 8.30am-4pm.

Phone: 1800 431 371

Email: QVADSupport@health.qld.gov.au

Support

You do not need to do this on your own and help is available. When someone is dying or has died it can be a very stressful time. Grief is different for everyone. There is no right way to feel when experiencing loss or helping someone through the voluntary assisted dying process. Grief can be complex, and it can also start before someone dies.

If grief or your involvement supporting someone through the voluntary assisted dying process is affecting your physical or mental wellbeing, you might consider speaking to your doctor or another healthcare worker (for example, a psychologist). Asking for help is okay. Different people will need and want different levels of support.

Additional resources available to help you:

- When someone dies: A practical guide for family and friends
<https://clinicalexcellence.qld.gov.au/sites/default/files/docs/improvement/end-life-care/bereavement-booklet.pdf>
- During sad news and sorry business: information and practical ideas for First Nations peoples about things to do before and after an adult passes away in Queensland.
<https://clinicalexcellence.qld.gov.au/sites/default/files/docs/improvement/end-life-care/bereavement-sad-news-sorry-business.pdf>

Support services

Call one of the helplines below for support and counselling:

24/7 crisis services

- Mental Health Access Line call 1300 64 22 55 (24/7)
- Lifeline call 13 11 14 (24/7 – phone, text, online)
- Suicide Call Back Service call 1300 659 467 (24/7 – phone and online)

Support services

- Beyond Blue call 1300 22 4636 (24/7 – phone, online)
- Griefline call 1300 845 745 (6am to midnight AEST, 7 days a week)
- Queensland Transcultural Mental Health Centre call 3317 1234 or 1800 188 189 (outside Brisbane) or 1300 64 22 55 (24/7)
- World Wellness Group (multicultural support) call 1300 079 020
- 13YARN (13 92 76) for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people

For more information and support visit <https://www.qld.gov.au/health/mental-health/help-lines>.



Help in your language

If you need an interpreter, ask your doctor for one. It is free.

For help reading this information call:

- Multicultural Connect Line free hotline number: 1300 079 020
- Interpreter Service (Help with English): 13 QGOV (13 74 68) and ask for an interpreter
- Translating and Interpreting Service: 13 14 50