

# TO THE VOTERS OF NEW ZEALAND

**AT THE UPCOMING GENERAL ELECTION, YOU WILL BE ASKED TO VOTE IN A BINDING REFERENDUM ON THE END OF LIFE CHOICE ACT 2019. WE, THE UNDERSIGNED RELIGIOUS LEADERS, WISH TO SHARE WITH YOU OUR GRAVE CONCERNS ABOUT THE FINAL FORM OF THIS ACT.**

We speak out of our extensive experience of caring for the dying. We know the effectiveness of compassionate end of life palliative care – care that is able to address not just the physical suffering of people who are dying, but also their emotional, spiritual and psychological suffering, as well as that of whānau and friends.

Medical practices that are part of good end-of-life care – ceasing treatment, Do Not Resuscitate Orders, Advanced Care Directives and turning off life support – are already legal and part of our health care choices and are not part of this proposed law.

The referendum question is not about the desirability of some form of ‘assisted dying’. Rather, we are being asked to vote on a specific piece of legislation – the End of Life Choice Act. The key consideration for all of us is the robustness and safety of this Act. **Our concerns are about the lack of safeguards in the Act and the dangers it would present.**

We note that the Act differs in the quality of its processes and safeguards from other laws overseas:

- The Act is not just designed for a small number of hard cases. It is broader than laws in Victoria and the United States because it allows both assisted suicide and euthanasia.
- This is not an Act of ‘last resort’ – there is no requirement to try effective treatments or palliative care. There is also no corresponding right in the proposed law for people to access palliative care.
- People will be able to access an assisted death without being in any physical pain. Overseas statistics show people choose assisted death primarily out of a fear of being a burden and/or being disabled.<sup>1</sup>
- The Act does not require a patient to discuss their decision with a family member or other significant person. All eligible persons, 18 years and over, could choose an assisted death without family knowing.
- There is no mandatory psychological assessment or effective screening for depression. Research shows that requests for an assisted death are commonly influenced by depression<sup>2</sup>, something that is extremely difficult to detect and often mistaken for ‘appropriate sadness’.
- The NZ Medical Association and Hospice NZ, who oppose the Act,<sup>3</sup> share concerns that it lacks processes enabling clinicians to be confident a person is making their request free of pressure from others.
- The two doctor ‘safeguard’ is weak; neither of the doctors need to have met the person previously.
- There is no mandatory stand-down period as there is in other countries - under the Act, a person could be dead less than 4 days after diagnosis.
- Unlike laws overseas, there is no requirement for independent observers or witnesses at any stage.
- The Act does not require a person to be assessed for competency at the time when the lethal dose is being administered, as is the case with laws overseas.

**The referendum is binding, meaning the Act cannot be changed - it will be enacted in its current form.**

We are also concerned that the practice of assisted suicide and euthanasia will become normalised over time, leading to a broadening of the criteria for eligibility as seen overseas. There is also evidence showing that people choose assisted death because of a lack of adequate care options.<sup>4</sup> There is a risk this will also happen in New Zealand, especially because effective palliative care is not yet universally available to all.

We acknowledge the importance of exercising freedom of choice. At the same time there is a need to balance individual choice with the common good of society. On balance, we believe that the significant weaknesses and dangers of the Act strongly outweigh the benefits that supporters of euthanasia seek.

**Even those who favour some form of assisted death have many reasons to Vote NO to the End of Life Choice Act.**

<b>Archbishop Philip Richardson</b>	Primate, Senior Bishop of the New Zealand Pakeha Dioceses and Bishop of Diocese of Waikato & Taranaki	<b>Archbishop Don Tamihere</b>	Primate, Pihopa o Aotearoa and Pihopa o Te Tairāwhiti
<b>Bishop Jay Behan</b>	Church of Confessing Anglicans, Aotearoa New Zealand	<b>Rev Setaita Taumoepeau K. Veikune</b>	President, Methodist Church of New Zealand
<b>Pastor Steve Burgess</b>	Regional Director, C3 Churches Pacific	<b>Pastor Adam White</b>	Leader, New Life Churches of New Zealand
<b>Commissioner Mark Campbell</b>	Territorial Commander, Salvation Army, New Zealand Territory	<b>Bishop Mark Whitfield</b>	Lutheran Church of New Zealand
<b>Bishop Patrick Dunn</b>	President of the NZ Catholic Bishops Conference; Catholic Diocese of Auckland	<b>Bishop Ross Bay</b>	Anglican Diocese of Auckland
<b>Dr Mustafa Farouk QSM</b>	President, The Federation of Islamic Associations of NZ (FIANZ)	<b>Bishop Steven Benford</b>	Anglican Diocese of Dunedin
<b>Rev Tavita Joseph Filemoni</b>	General Secretary, Wesleyan Samoan Methodist Church of New Zealand & Australia	<b>Bishop Peter Carrell</b>	Anglican Diocese of Christchurch
<b>Charles Hewlett</b>	National Leader of the Baptist Churches of NZ	<b>Cardinal John Dew</b>	Catholic Archdiocese of Wellington
<b>Rev. Brett Jones</b>	National Superintendent (Acting), Wesleyan Methodist Church of NZ	<b>Bishop Michael Dooley</b>	Catholic Diocese of Dunedin
<b>Right Reverend Fakaofu Kaio</b>	Moderator, The Presbyterian Church in New Zealand	<b>Bishop Justin Duckworth</b>	Anglican Diocese of Wellington
<b>Metropolitan Myron</b>	New Zealand Greek Orthodox Church	<b>Pastor Max Faletutulu</b>	Senior Pastor, Titahi Bay Community Church, Wellington
<b>Rev Dr Stuart Lange</b>	National Director, New Zealand Christian Network	<b>Bishop Michael Gielen</b>	Catholic Diocese of Auckland - Auxiliary
<b>Pastor David MacGregor</b>	National Director, Vineyard Churches Aotearoa NZ; Senior Pastor, Grace Vineyard Church Christchurch	<b>Bishop Andrew Hedge</b>	Anglican Diocese of Waipapu
<b>Rev Andrew Marshall</b>	National Director, Alliance Churches of New Zealand	<b>Bishop Stephen Lowe</b>	Catholic Diocese of Hamilton
<b>Pastor Peter Mortlock</b>	Senior Pastor, City Impact Churches of NZ	<b>Bishop Steve Maina</b>	Anglican Diocese of Nelson
		<b>Pastor Kaio Mamea</b>	The Light of All Nations Church, Wellington
		<b>Bishop Paul Martin SM</b>	Catholic Diocese of Christchurch
		<b>Bishop Te Kitohi Pikaahu</b>	Pihopatanga o Te Taitokerau
		<b>Bishop Waitohiariki Quayle</b>	Pihopatanga o Te Upoko o Te Ika
		<b>Rt Revd Dr Eleanor Sanderson</b>	Assistant Anglican Bishop of Wellington
		<b>Bishop Richard Wallace</b>	Pihopatanga o Te Waipounamu
		<b>Rev Brian Walsh</b>	Local Administrator, Catholic Diocese of Palmerston North

Authorised by Archbishop Philip Richardson, 566 Mangorei Road, New Plymouth

<sup>1</sup> See Oregon Death with Dignity 2019 Data Summary, page 12. <http://tiny.cc/Oregon2019>

<sup>2</sup> See, for example, Chochinov HM, Wilson KG, and Enns M. et al. Desire for death in the terminally ill. *Am J Psychiatry*. 1995 152:1185-1191.

<sup>3</sup> See <https://www.nzma.org.nz/news/an-important-choice-end-of-life-choice-act-referendum-fact-sheet>; <https://www.hospice.org.nz/resources/end-of-life-choice-act-our-concerns/euthanasia-our-opinion/>

<sup>4</sup> See, for example, Herx L, Cottle M, and Scott J. The “Normalization” of Euthanasia in Canada: the Cautionary Tale Continues. *World Medical Journal*, [https://www.wma.net/wp-content/uploads/2020/05/newwmj\\_2\\_2020\\_WEB.pdf](https://www.wma.net/wp-content/uploads/2020/05/newwmj_2_2020_WEB.pdf)