**Statement – disability groups withdraw from the ACT Government VAD Implementation**

Advocacy for Inclusion, ACT Down Syndrome and Intellectual Disability ACT and Women with Disabilities ACT – coming together as the ACT Disability Directed Advocacy Caucus - intend to withdraw from participation in the implementation of the ACT Governments Voluntary Assisted Dying (VAD) reforms.

Despite the ACT Government resourcing its own involvement including, we understand, 20 dedicated staff working on the implementation, people with disability have not received any support to engage our members around VAD, manage unintended consequences from its implementation or to create safe consultations across more than 2 years of work.

Work on VAD is resource and time intensive and requires consultation on detailed and sensitive subject matter in a way that manages risks and the mitigates any potential for harm within a community with varied views on VAD and complex consultation requirements.

It has now become apparent through the community and consumer consultation group that Government expects us to contribute to the ongoing analysis of detailed and complex clinical policies and documents without any lift in capability or capacity over the next twelve months.

This means that we are now required to marshal resources between various pieces of important but unfunded work in the health area as well as contribute to the development of the new Foundational Support system.  Meanwhile spiralling cuts to NDIS also require attention, advocacy and sensitive interactions in our community.

As we make this decision, we note that disability groups have been attempting to constructively engage on VAD since the initial consultations began.

At various times we have called for supports for the community to engage, funding to address unintended consequences in the VAD debate such as hate speech, investments in social model training for practitioners, an emergency support pool for people with disabilities and dedicated suicide prevention work.

Unfortunately, it is not apparent that any of our contributions have been acted on and few of these measures or initiatives seem to be prioritised in the VAD scheme being developed.

In these circumstances we cannot be confident that further investment in work on VAD is a good use of our resources and we will not be attending further meetings or consultations on the reforms.

We urge the Government to attend to the supports, safeguards, limits, equity issues and other considerations that have been raised by disability organisations across the development period.  AFI and DSID has previously advised the Minister for Health of our intentions and are publishing a statement to this effect letting our stakeholders know.

Issued by

Craig Wallace (Head of Policy) AFI, Kat Reed (CEO WWDACT) and Shannon Kolak (CEO ACTDSID)

4 December 2024