



*End-of-life
Care at Mater*

Medical practitioner
guidelines



In September 2021, the Voluntary Assisted Dying Act 2021 (Qld) was enacted, allowing Queenslanders as of 1 January 2023, in very specific situations, to take a medication prescribed by a medical practitioner to bring about their death. In recognising the significance of this legislation and its potential impact for patients and staff, Mater has prepared this document to assist you whilst you work in or for Mater.

Who we are

We are a Catholic, not-for-profit healthcare provider, inspired by the missionary vision of the Mercy Sisters.

Our Mission is to serve together to bring God's mercy to our communities through compassionate, transforming, healing ministries.

We believe every person deserves the utmost respect and access to the best possible healthcare.

Our position

Mater welcomes all to our service, regardless of their views and beliefs. We have a commitment to excellence in end-of-life care, demonstrated through our commitment to palliative and supportive care. We do not support, facilitate or provide services for the provision of voluntary assisted dying (VAD).

Background and context

Excellence in end-of-life care in the context of Catholic health services means a commitment to the ethic of healing.

Our ethic of healing includes commitments to:

- Heal and never to harm
- Relieve pain and other physical and psychosocial symptoms of illness and suffering
- Withdraw treatments when they are futile, overly burdensome or when a person no longer wants them and gives informed refusal of these treatments
- Never abandon the people in our care

We assist the people in our care to die in comfort and with dignity. We do not assist them to end their own lives.

We will continue to promote and provide healthcare that is consistent with our commitment and values. Our care is guided by the Code of Ethical Standards for Catholic Health Australia.



Requirements of health care practitioners in relation to VAD at Mater

Mater's *Requests for Voluntary Assisted Dying - State-wide Policy and Responding to VAD Requests - State-wide Procedure* articulate our response to the VAD Act 2021 (QLD) and outline how Mater staff and visiting medical practitioners can provide consistent, ethical and compassionate care to patients and consumers.

The Mater By-Laws for Accredited Practitioners require adherence to the Code of Ethical Standards for Catholic Health and Aged Care, as well as all Mater policies and procedures.

It is an accreditation requirement that, while working in our facilities or services, medical practitioners will:

1. Provide effective pain management and respect patients' decisions (or, if they are not competent, those of their medical treatment decision-maker)
2. Forego treatments that are overly burdensome, therapeutically futile, or that are unwanted
3. Acknowledge the importance of any questions about end-of-life care options in a sensitive and compassionate manner (i.e. all questions should be answered openly and honestly, using plain language, avoiding the use of jargon and medical terminology)
4. Not initiate discussions about VAD or facilitate or participate in assessments undertaken for the purpose of a patient gaining access to, or making use of, interventions allowed under the VAD Act

5. Not prescribe or facilitate the provision of the substance permitted under the VAD Act
6. Provide reasonable access at Mater facilities for VAD information and health practitioners, in compliance with the VAD Act and Mater's policies.

In accordance with usual medical practice, medical practitioners will provide medical information to a receiving health service when a person is transferred to another facility of their choice.

Mater will always strive to keep treating medical practitioners updated and informed of their patient's decisions and choices.

End-of-life care options at Mater

At Mater we provide palliative and supportive care and chronic disease services throughout all campuses of our health service. These services are provided to ensure that quality of life for patients and their families is enhanced wherever the person wishes to receive care.

If patients or consumers have questions about VAD, they should be referred to one of our professional staff who will engage in sensitive end-of-life care discussions, including the services available at Mater. Please contact the Nurse Unit Manager or After-Hours Manager with questions or concerns.

Key messages

Mater does not participate in or facilitate services in relation to voluntary assisted dying (VAD).

- VAD is not consistent with our values or ethic of care as set out in the Code of Ethical Standards for Catholic Health Australia
- Mater has a tiered governance system for VAD with designated Tier 1 team members available to provide:
 - Sensitive end-of-life care discussions with patients and consumers
 - Information on end-of-life care options and services at Mater
 - A contact point in the facility for medical practitioners to refer VAD requests to.
- Palliative services at Mater include:
 - In-patient and community care
 - Medical consulting and nurse liaison
 - Symptom management
 - Discharge planning and home support

Further information

- Palliative care services at Mater can be found on the website at mater.org.au/health/about/voluntary-assisted-dying
- If you have questions, concerns or require further information about VAD and Mater, please contact the Nurse Unit Manager, After-Hours Manager, Director of Clinical Services or Executive Officer
- Specialist support is available for staff and visiting health care professionals involved in the treatment and care of terminal patients. Please contact Pastoral Care or After-Hours Manager, Advance Care Planning Coordinator, palliative care doctors and Clinical Nurse Consultants.
- The Queensland Government manages all information about VAD in Queensland. Find more information at health.qld.gov.au/system-governance/legislation/voluntary-assisted-dying-act
- For information on end-of-life conversations, visit the Queensland Government website qld.gov.au/health/support/end-of-life
- Further information about the Catholic ethic of care as it pertains to people who have a life-limiting illness and/or are nearing the end of their lives, is set out in the Code of Ethical Standards for Catholic Health and Aged Care Services in Australia. cha.org.au/wp-content/uploads/2021/06/Code-of-ethicsfullcopy.pdf

'The Heart to Heal, the Strength to Grow' artwork by David Williams of Gilimbaa.

Mater acknowledges that our services are provided on Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander lands and pay respect to their Elders – past, present and emerging.

