

Voluntary Assisted Dying

Q&As

What is Voluntary Assisted Dying?

- Voluntary Assisted Dying (VAD) is an additional end-of-life choice that gives eligible people who are suffering and dying the option of asking for medical assistance to end their lives. There are strict eligibility criteria for accessing VAD.

When will VAD be available in Queensland?

- The VAD Act 2021 (QLD) was passed in September 2021. It will be available to eligible Queenslanders from 1 January 2023.

What is Mater's position on VAD?

- Mater will not be participating in VAD.
- Mater's position is that doctors and other healthcare practitioners should not intentionally cause the death of a person in their care and should not assist a person in taking their own life.
- All are welcome to access Mater's healthcare services, whatever their views and beliefs. We will support our staff in being able to respond in a sensitive and open way to any person's desire to discuss or access VAD. We will never abandon our patients and we will continue to accompany them, if they choose, from diagnosis until their death.

What do I say when a member of the public asks about Mater's position on VAD?

- Mater has a long-standing commitment to excellence in end of life care and extensive palliative and supportive care services, which we will continue to provide.
- Mater will not support, facilitate or provide services associated with VAD.
- Our services always strive to ensure that those in our care die in comfort and with dignity.
- Mater will not abandon people in our care, even if their views are not consistent with our position.

What do I say and do if a Mater patient asks about VAD?

- It is important to acknowledge the significance of such questions in a sensitive and compassionate manner.
- All questions should be answered openly and honestly, to the best of your ability. You should inform the person that, at Mater, we do not provide services for the purpose of VAD, but there are many other end of life care services available.
- Remind the person that even if they choose to access VAD services elsewhere they will remain welcome at Mater for all other care needs. Mater has a range of professional staff across multiple disciplines who have undergone training to engage in discussions of this nature.

Will Mater staff try to talk patients out of their request for VAD?

- It is illegal, as well as unethical, to try and persuade a person in their decision about VAD. As with any person considering their treatment options, we have a duty of care to ensure we provide patients and consumers with information to ensure they are making an informed choice. This is why Mater has a range of professionals across multiple disciplines qualified and available to engage in these discussions. These people are called "Tier 1" staff.



The Tier 1 response involves:

- Providing an opportunity to discuss end-of-life care options with the patient and/or their medical treatment decision maker/care giver;
- Providing access for patients to end-of-life care options consistent with Mater's Code of Ethics;
- Seeking to understand the nature of the request, clarifying whether the patient is in need of end-of-life services that Mater is able to provide and ensuring that the patient is aware of Mater's commitment to provide care to them;
- Responding to the patient request for information about VAD in a manner consistent with their capabilities and in line with our ethic of care and values;
- Notifying the Nurse Unit Manger or After-Hours Manager or Advance Care Planning Coordinator in the first instance;
- Ensuring that the admitting medical practitioner has been notified; and
- Documenting the request as per requirements.

If, after the discussion, the patient still expresses a desire to further explore VAD, information on alternatives will be provided along with clear communication that VAD is not provided in Mater facilities.

The patient may be referred to the Queensland Government VAD Support Service (Q-VAD) for further information by the Tier 1 team.

Can I conscientiously object to caring for a Mater patient who I know to be seeking VAD or has the substance at home?

- Conscientious objection is when a healthcare professional refuses to provide, or participate in, a legally-recognised treatment or procedure because it conflicts with his or her own personal beliefs and values. As VAD is not a service that Mater will be offering, you will not be required to provide, facilitate or directly participate in VAD at Mater. You should continue to treat your patient with dignity, compassion and respect, and provide all usual care to them. You should refrain from expressing your own personal beliefs.
- Mater People should speak with their manager if they require further information or support.

Will Mater transfer patients, or consumers to external facilities for VAD services?

- Although Mater does not provide services for VAD, we respect our patients' choice to pursue these services elsewhere in accordance with the Act and will not obstruct them. If a person wishes to go to another facility for services related to VAD, we will assist with or coordinate their transfer to an appropriate receiving provider of their choice. In accordance with usual practice, medical practitioners will provide all appropriate medical information to the receiving provider.

Can I still discuss death and dying with Mater patients?

- It is important to recognise that discussions about death and dying, including a person's desire for death, are not necessarily related to VAD and may form part of an appropriate therapeutic relationship.
- Some people might find this kind of discussion very difficult or upsetting. Mater has pastoral care practitioners, social workers and trained nursing staff available to support patients. Pastoral care practitioners and peer support is also available for our staff and visiting medical practitioners.

How do I refer your a patient to trained staff members for more information?

- A suggested response is: "You have asked a very important question. I would like to get somebody to discuss this further with you." At each site the Nurse Unit Manager, Director Clinical Services / Executive Officer will be able to assist you in finding a Tier 1 team member to meet with the patient.
- Guidelines to assist Mater People with conversations about end-of-life care and VAD can be found at mater.org.au/VAD
- Mater Education is facilitating training for all Mater People to assist with responding to all VAD requests.