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MEDIA RELEASE

STEP Queensland Presents Extensive Recommendations to Parliamentary Tribunal on Voluntary Assisted Dying

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Proposed legislation to allow voluntary assisted dying in Queensland prompts STEP Queensland to Provide Guidance and Caution to a parliamentary Tribunal

In response to a recent government consultation paper on proposed legislation governing legal euthanasia (voluntary assisted dying), STEP Queensland provided a submission to the Queensland Law Reform Commission with a detailed set of recommendations and cautions (read the full submission [here](#)). The salient issues highlighted in the submission are ensuring the safety and protection of vulnerable individuals who may be affected by the legislation, as well as facilitating the unimpeded actioning of the wishes of people intending to exercise their option of voluntary assisted dying.

STEP Queensland's submission prompted the Queensland Government to invite Chris Herrald TEP and Jennifer Sheean TEP (*Chair and Deputy Chair of STEP Queensland*) as witnesses at the Parliamentary Inquiry into the *Voluntary Assisted Dying Laws Bill* held 15 July 2021. STEP Queensland's submission and committee appearance intended to assist in forming the basis for a reliable, ethical legal framework on this complex and controversial matter.

The legislation as proposed would entail allowing eligible individuals to voluntarily die via medical intervention. STEP Queensland has raised several specific concerns with the proposed framework for voluntary assisted dying – these relate largely to matters of efficiency and protecting vulnerable Australians from harm. Eligibility criteria have been noted as particularly essential to a correctly functioning legislative act. For example, STEP Queensland recommends that disability and mental illness do not inherently disqualify a person from exercising voluntary assisted dying. Rather, the assessment of eligibility should rely largely on a person's mental capacity to make the decision to voluntarily die.

STEP further recommends that a person must have such capacity at all times during the process – if an individual loses capacity before the voluntary assisted dying process is complete, it is recommended they are deemed ineligible. This requirement for constant capacity highlights further the need for an efficient, unimpeded system given the fact that in many cases progressive illness may render a person incapable of making such a decision.

Protecting vulnerable Australians can, inter-alia, be achieved by requiring extensive training on capacity assessment for medical practitioners involved in voluntary assisted dying, according to the STEP Queensland policy committee. Chris Herrald TEP states this training would result in *“a noticeable difference in the way health practitioners approach an assessment of capacity”*, which will strengthen the protection of mentally vulnerable individuals under this proposed legislation. Furthermore, the government consultation paper on voluntary assisted dying raises the possibility of requiring a permit to be considered eligible. STEP Queensland recommends strongly against this suggestion because it *“may unnecessarily delay the process and lead to an unnecessary prolonging of the person's suffering.”*

Given the life-and-death significance of voluntary assisted dying legislation, STEP Queensland's professional input on this matter is intended to ensure a safer, more efficient, and more ethical legal framework to protect the interests of Australian families.

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REFERENCES:

View the Health and Environment Committee Public Hearing [here](#)

Read the full submission by STEP Queensland on Voluntary Assisted dying [here](#) for the full set of STEP recommendations.

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ABOUT STEP:

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