

# Information for ambulance officers

## What is voluntary assisted dying?

Voluntary assisted dying (VAD) in Queensland allows eligible people diagnosed with a life-limiting condition who are suffering intolerably and dying to choose the timing and circumstances of their death.

The [Voluntary Assisted Dying Act 2021](#) (the Act) sets the framework for Queensland's VAD scheme.

Eligible medical practitioners can participate in VAD as a coordinating practitioner, consulting practitioner, or administering practitioner. Eligible nurse practitioners and registered nurses can participate as an administering practitioner.

VAD involves administration of a substance with the purpose of bringing about the person's death. In consultation with and on the advice of their coordinating practitioner, a person who accesses VAD may choose the method for administration:

- **Self-administration:** the person administers the VAD substance themselves. **This is the default method of administration.**
- **Practitioner administration:** the VAD substance is administered to the person by the administering practitioner. A practitioner administration decision may only be made if the coordinating practitioner advises self-administration is inappropriate due to specific reasons.

## The role of ambulance officers

An ambulance officer being called to attend a person who is accessing VAD is likely to be a rare occurrence. If attending, ambulance officer can provide palliative and comfort care to the person, support family, carers and friends, and complete a life extinct form.

Ambulance officers usually have a duty to administer life-sustaining treatment. This is not the case with VAD.

## Protections from liability

[Part 10](#) of the Act provides protection from civil liability, criminal liability and breach of professional ethics or standards for ambulance officers, registered health practitioners, and student health practitioners who:

- assist a person to access VAD
- are present when a person is administered, or has self-administered, a VAD substance
- perform roles and functions under the Act without negligence
- do not administer life-sustaining treatment to a person who has accessed VAD.

For the protections to apply, the ambulance officer and the person accessing VAD must be located in Queensland at the time the steps are undertaken.

## Life-sustaining treatment

[Section 149](#) of the Act provides protection for ambulance officers, registered health practitioners, and student health practitioners who do not administer life-sustaining treatment where:

- the person has not requested it
- the ambulance officer, registered health practitioner or student health practitioner believes the person is dying after administration of the VAD substance (either self-administered or practitioner administered in accordance with the Act).

This protection applies if the ambulance officer, registered health practitioner or student health practitioner is acting '**in good faith**': that is, they honestly believe the person is dying after self-administering or being administered a VAD substance.

The ambulance officer, registered health practitioner or student health practitioner must also have '**reasonable grounds**' to believe the person is dying after administration of a VAD substance. This means a reasonable person in the same circumstances would consider there was a reasonable basis for the decision.

Importantly, if a person asks for life-sustaining treatment, the ambulance officer, registered health practitioner, or student health practitioner must provide it, or they will be liable for breaching their duty to the person. In the very unlikely event a person changes their mind and asks for life-sustaining treatment after ingesting or being administered a VAD substance, that treatment must be provided to the person.

If an ambulance officer, registered health practitioner, or student health practitioner does not know a person had administered a VAD substance and resuscitates the person or provides life-sustaining treatment, they will not be liable if this was reasonable in the circumstances.

Information for healthcare workers will be provided to a person who has made a self-administration decision to assist ambulance officers and other health practitioners to confirm the person has died from administration of a VAD substance.

## Life extinct form

A life extinct form is only completed when a cause of death certificate is not likely to be issued expeditiously. When a cause of death certificate exists, a life extinct form is not required.

An ambulance officer may complete a life extinct form for the deceased person if:

- a medical practitioner is not available to complete the cause of death certificate
- a nurse practitioner or registered nurse acting as the administering practitioner is not available to complete a life extinct form.

## VAD is not a reportable death

Under the *Coroners Act 2003* (Qld), a death brought about by VAD in accordance with the Act is not a reportable death. Refer to the [State Coroner's Guidelines 2013 Chapter 3: Reporting deaths](#) for more information.

## More information

More information about VAD is available on the [Queensland Health website](#).