



SUMMARY

- Assisted dying reform is needed to afford freedom of choice and bodily autonomy to those seeking an assisted death. As evidenced in increasingly many countries and states across the globe, assisted dying laws can be introduced with safe and robust safeguards and not at the expense of palliative care.
- The current law prohibiting assisted dying is cruel and not fit for purpose. People with serious health conditions are more than twice as likely to die by suicide. More than one person a week goes abroad to end their life but many more cannot afford to do so.
- Parliament is not likely to be given enough time to properly debate the scope of an assisted dying bill and the appropriate safeguards needed. An inquiry would equip parliamentarians with the knowledge needed to properly vote on this issue.

THE CASE FOR ASSISTED DYING

- Assisted dying reform is central to human dignity, compassion, and freedom of choice.
- **People with serious health conditions are more than twice as likely to die by suicide.** A study by the Office of National Statistics found elevated suicide rates for patients diagnosed with heart and lung conditions as well as severe cancers.¹
- Palliative care is vital, but cannot ease everyone's suffering. The Office of Health Economics found that even if they received the best possible palliative medicine, at least 6,000 per year would die without any effective pain relief in their final month.²
- Research from the UK Assisted Dying Coalition found that **more than one person a week is now forced to end their life abroad.**³ However, many others cannot afford the high costs of travelling abroad. The right to die should not be limited to those with means.
- **There has also been a significant shift in professional medical opinion and within the disability community.** The British Medical Association ended its opposition and moved to a neutral position on assisted dying in 2021.⁴ This reflects the position of similar medical bodies including the Royal Colleges of Physicians, Medicine, Nursing and Psychiatrists.⁵ Moreover, up to **88% of people living with a disability now support a change in the law**, as is reflected in the fact that an independent study of **140 UK disability rights organisations found that 96% did not oppose reform.**⁶

¹ Office of National Statistics, 'Suicides among people diagnosed with severe health conditions, England: 2017 to 2020' (2022) <https://www.ons.gov.uk/peoplepopulationandcommunity/birthsdeathsandmarriages/deaths/bulletins/suicidesamongpeoplediagnosedwithseverehealthconditionsengland/2017to2020>

² Zamora et al, 'Unrelieved Pain in Palliative Care in England' Office of Health Economics (2019). <https://www.ohe.org/publications/unrelieved-pain-palliative-care-england>

³ The Assisted Dying Coalition. 'Number of UK citizens going to Switzerland to seek an assisted death'. https://humanism.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/2019-2-1-KM-Assisted-Dying-Briefing_-_Number-of-UK-citizens-going-to-Switzerland-to-see-an-assisted-death-1.pdf

⁴ Humanists UK. 'BMA drops opposition to assisted dying'. 2021. <https://humanists.uk/2021/09/14/bma-drops-opposition-to-assisted-dying/>

⁵ Humanists UK. 'Royal College of Physicians moves from hostile to neutral position on assisted dying'. 2019. <https://humanists.uk/2019/03/21/royal-college-of-physicians-moves-from-hostile-to-neutral-position-on-assisted-dying/>

⁶ G Box *et al*, 'Views of disability rights organisations on assisted dying legislation in England, Wales and Scotland: an analysis of position statements' *J Med Ethics* 2021 Jan 5;medethics-2020-107021. doi: 10.1136/medethics-2020-107021



WHY AN INQUIRY?

- Baroness Meacher's 2021–22 Assisted Dying Bill **received over 200 amendments** at the Committee Stage and failed due to a lack of parliamentary time. Many of these amendments were made to debate the nature of safeguards, definitions, and diagnosis. An inquiry would give enough time for proper scrutiny and ensure that key issues, such as eligibility and safeguards for assisted dying, are addressed.
- The Assisted Dying Coalition is calling for a law that is inclusive of the incurably, intolerably suffering. We believe there is no strong moral case to limit an assisted dying law to the terminally ill. An inquiry would be able to determine the possible scope of any assisted dying legislation.
- There are predominately two models of assisted dying around the world showing that both are viable models. The first, found in **Austria, Belgium, Canada, Colombia, Germany, Italy, Luxembourg, the Netherlands, Spain and Switzerland**, legalises assisted dying for both the terminally ill and incurably suffering. The second, mainly found in 11 US jurisdictions, but also New Zealand, and 5 Australian states, only provides assistance to those who are terminally ill and likely to die within 6 months. An inquiry would be able to investigate these international models to determine which would be most suitable for the UK.
- The States Assembly in Jersey formed a Citizens' Jury in 2021 to address assisted dying in Jersey. The Jury was composed of randomly selected members of the public and examined if assisted dying should be legalised and if so the eligibility, circumstances, and safeguards. The Jury led to the States Assembly approving assisted dying for the terminally ill and incurably suffering 'in principle', and a debate on proposals is due to take place in October 2022, with draft legislation available for approval by the end of March 2023.
- In Scotland, Liam McArthur, MSP for Orkney, proposed a Members Bill for assisted dying for the terminally ill. The public consultation on the bill **received an unprecedented number of responses**, showing that this is an important issue that deserves considerable public scrutiny.
- Doctors, nurses, carers, social workers, palliative care professionals and many other professionals actively want to be involved in the creation of new legislation. **All of these people, and the bodies that represent them, should be heard.**