

Voluntary Assisted Dying in ACT

Information for pharmacists

This information is for pharmacists working in the ACT, including those in community pharmacies, hospitals, and aged care settings. It aims to answer common questions pharmacists may have in relation to voluntary assisted dying. This information should be read together with other resources, especially the [Voluntary Assisted Dying Act 2024](#) (the Act), the ACT [Voluntary Assisted Dying Clinical Guidelines](#) (the Clinical Guidelines) and other guidance for health professionals.

This information is not intended to cover all aspects of voluntary assisted dying. It focuses on specific situations that pharmacists may come across in their day to day work. It supports pharmacists to provide respectful, inclusive, and legally appropriate information to patients, carers and families about voluntary assisted dying.

What is Voluntary Assisted Dying?

Voluntary assisted dying is available in the ACT for eligible people as an option for end-of-life care alongside palliative care as of 3 November 2025. It allows an approved person to decide to end their life by taking an approved substance at a time of their choosing.

To access voluntary assisted dying, a person must meet all eligibility criteria and follow the full process under the Act within the geographical borders of the ACT. They can choose to pause or stop the process at any time before the substance is consumed or administered.

Only medical practitioners, nurse practitioners or registered nurses who meet the experience requirements, formally apply and then complete the mandatory training requirements may become authorised voluntary assisted dying practitioners.

More information about the process is available at act.gov.au.

Who can access voluntary assisted dying?

Two authorised practitioners (at least one being a medical practitioner) must independently agree that the person requesting voluntary assisted dying meets the following eligibility criteria:

- they are an adult aged 18 years or older

- they have a diagnosed condition that is advanced, progressive and expected to cause death, either on its own or in combination with other diagnosed conditions
- they are experiencing intolerable suffering
- they have decision-making capacity in relation to voluntary assisted dying throughout the process
- they are acting voluntarily and without coercion
- they have been a resident of the ACT for at least the last 12 months, or they have been granted an exemption by the Director-General.

The person can pause or stop the voluntary assisted dying process at any time, even when they receive the substance. The person does not need to give a reason.

What is the voluntary assisted dying substance?

The medication prescribed in voluntary assisted dying is referred to as the voluntary assisted dying substance. Details about the voluntary assisted dying substance is limited to minimise unintended harms to the community and in keeping with the provisions of the Commonwealth [Criminal Code Act 1995](#).

What is the ACT Voluntary Assisted Dying Pharmacy Service?

The ACT Voluntary Assisted Dying Pharmacy Service (VAD PS) is the only pharmacy that can supply and dispose of the voluntary assisted dying substance, in all its formulations. It is co-located with the ACT Voluntary Assisted Dying Care Navigator Service (VAD CNS) at Canberra Hospital.

VAD PS will help ensure eligible people receive the voluntary assisted dying substance with support and education in line with best practice principles. VAD PS will be available Monday to Friday 8:30am to 4:30pm (closed weekends and public holidays). The VAD PS phone number is 5124 1888.

What happens afterhours?

Voluntary assisted dying services in ACT operate within business hours. Voluntary assisted dying is a planned process that may take a person weeks or months to complete depending on their circumstances.

If a person requires outside of hours palliative and end-of-life care, then they should follow standard care management pathways.

How is the voluntary assisted dying substance prescribed?

To provide voluntary assisted dying services in the ACT, a practitioner must become authorised by meeting qualification and experience requirements and successfully completing mandatory training based on the ACT legislation. Only authorised medical or nurse practitioners can prescribe the voluntary assisted dying substance.

If needed, the VAD CNS will be able help a person to find an authorised practitioner.

Once a person has followed the voluntary assisted dying process and is confirmed as eligible at their final assessment under the Act, the prescription is written on a specific template and sent directly to VAD PS. The prescription is not given to the person themselves.

How is the voluntary assisted dying substance administered?

Eligible people can choose to:

- Take the substance themselves (orally or via an enteral device), or
- Have it administered by an authorised practitioner (orally, via enteral device, or intravenously).

For self-administration any adult can help the person to prepare the substance, however the person must take it independently and without assistance. If someone chooses self-administration, they must appoint a contact person who has specific roles and responsibilities set by the Act. A prescription can only be written once the contact person is appointed. More details about the contact person will be available on the ACT government website.

How is the voluntary assisted dying substance supplied?

- For self-administration, it will be supplied in a kit containing the voluntary assisted dying substance within a locked box (with the key to the box stored safely in another location such as with the approved person), adjunct medications, and all necessary equipment. The person and their contact person will receive face to face education and written instructions from the coordinating practitioner and a pharmacist from VAD PS.
- For practitioner administration, a kit will be supplied directly to the authorised practitioner for administration who is responsible for the safe storage of the substance before, during and after administration including returning to the VAD PS for disposal.

How should the voluntary assisted dying substance be stored for self-administration?

There are strict storage requirements for the substance and education is provided by the authorised practitioner and VAD PS. The substance must be kept in the locked box provided, stored securely and away from children or vulnerable people. The box and key should be kept in two different places. The box must remain locked unless the substance is being prepared for administration. Only the person accessing voluntary assisted dying (or their contact person) are authorised to have possession of the kit.

A guidance document is available on the ACT Government website for facilities such as hospitals and aged care homes. It includes important information about how to safely store voluntary assisted dying substances in a facility.

Who can dispose of the voluntary assisted dying substance?

Most of the time, once a person has taken the voluntary assisted dying substance, there will not be any left. Sometimes there may be unused or remaining substance if:

- the person dies before taking the substance
- the person dies without taking all the substance, or
- the person changes their mind and does not want to take the substance.

Only pharmacists employed at VAD PS are authorised to dispose of the voluntary assisted dying substance. If a voluntary assisted dying substance is no longer required, the eligible person, the contact person or an administering practitioner should return the kit to VAD PS. In certain cases, the VAD PS may also be contacted to collect it. It is an offence under the Act to not return the substance to the VAD PS within the legislated timeframes.

If the voluntary assisted dying substance for self-administration is no longer needed, such as if they change their mind, they or their contact person must return the substance to VAD PS for disposal as soon as possible and within 14 days. If the person dies of another cause, the contact person must return it to VAD PS as soon as possible and within 14 days. The VAD PS may contact the contact person to remind them to return the substance kit and any remaining or unused substance within the required timeframe.

- If the voluntary assisted dying substance for practitioner-administration is no longer needed, the authorised practitioner must return it to VAD PS for disposal as soon as possible and within 14 days.

What if the voluntary assisted dying substance is returned to a community pharmacy?

- If someone tries to return a voluntary assisted dying substance to your pharmacy, **do not accept it**. Remind them that they are legally required to return it to the **VAD PS**. A person accessing voluntary assisted dying, their contact person and administering practitioner are provided written and verbal education about this requirement.
- If your pharmacy accidentally receives a voluntary assisted dying substance:
 - Contact VAD PS as soon as possible to arrange for it to be collected.
 - Record the details and lock the substance in the pharmacy safe.

Talking about voluntary assisted dying

A pharmacist can answer questions from a person, carers or family about end-of-life care including voluntary assisted dying. People should be asked if they would like to have their carers, family members or friends involved in end-of-life discussions. A pharmacist should ask the person if they are engaged with Palliative Care. All efforts should be made to ensure that these discussions occur in an environment that respects their privacy and gives them the time and space required to meet their needs.

Any questions about how to prepare and take the voluntary assisted dying substance should be referred to pharmacists from VAD PS. This information can not be provided over a carriage service (such as the phone, video-call or internet) under sections 474.29A and 474.29B of the *Criminal Code Act 1995*.

Can a pharmacist raise voluntary assisted dying with patients?

In the ACT, health professionals can raise voluntary assisted dying as an end-of-life choice in discussions with their patients, but some specific obligations set out in the Act apply.

A pharmacist can initiate a discussion with a patient about voluntary assisted dying, but this must be part of a broader discussion about other treatment and palliative care options. These requirements are a safeguard against the possibility that a person might feel pressured to access voluntary assisted dying in discussions with health professionals.

A pharmacist can raise voluntary assisted dying with a person, but they must ensure they:

- a) know or reasonably believe the person has been diagnosed with an eligible condition, and

- b) take reasonable steps to ensure the person knows that –
 - a. treatment and palliative care options are available to them, and
 - b. the person should discuss the options with their treating doctor.

Can a pharmacist conscientiously object to voluntary assisted dying?

Pharmacists who have a conscientious objection to voluntary assisted dying can choose **not to take part** in any part of the process. This includes refusing to be involved in discussions or decisions about voluntary assisted dying.

However, a health professional with a conscientious objection to voluntary assisted dying cannot obstruct a person seeking information or pursuing access to voluntary assisted dying. Such actions are offences under the Act.

They must do the following:

- tell the person they are unable to assist them as soon as possible; and
- provide the person with the contact details for the Voluntary Assisted Dying Care Navigator Service in writing and within two business days of making the decision to refuse the request; and
- continue to provide comprehensive person-centered care at the same level, and if necessary, arrange for transfer of care to another appropriately qualified health professional

Voluntary Assisted Dying Care Navigator Service

The Voluntary Assisted Dying Care Navigator Service (VAD CNS) provides the community as well as all health professionals with support and a point of contact in relation to voluntary assisted dying services.

The VAD CNS is staffed by registered nurses as part of a multidisciplinary team and is open from Monday to Friday 8:30am to 5:00pm (excluding public holidays).

Phone number: 5124 1888 Email: VAD.carenavigators@act.gov.au

Where can you get support or more information?

- The [ACT Government website](#) has updates and resources, including
 - [The ACT voluntary assisted dying clinical guidelines](#)
 - [General awareness training for health professionals](#)
- [Pharmacy practice update on voluntary assisted dying](#) from Advanced Pharmacy Australia.
- Free national pharmacist palliative care training program: [ASPIRE Palliative Care Foundation Training Program](#)
- For emotional support, contact [Lifeline](#) (13 11 14) or [Griefline](#) (1300 845 745).
- [Pharmacist Support Service](#) (1300 244 910) 8am to 11pm every day.

Accessibility

If you have difficulty reading a standard printed document and would like an alternative format, please phone 13 22 81.



If English is not your first language and you need the Translating and Interpreting Service (TIS), please call 13 14 50.

For further accessibility information, visit: www.health.act.gov.au/accessibility

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