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Living with VAD: the impact on end of life care



Outline



- Definitions
- Arguments for and against assisted dying
- What is really going on?
- Future trends
- How should Christians respond?

EUTHANASIA

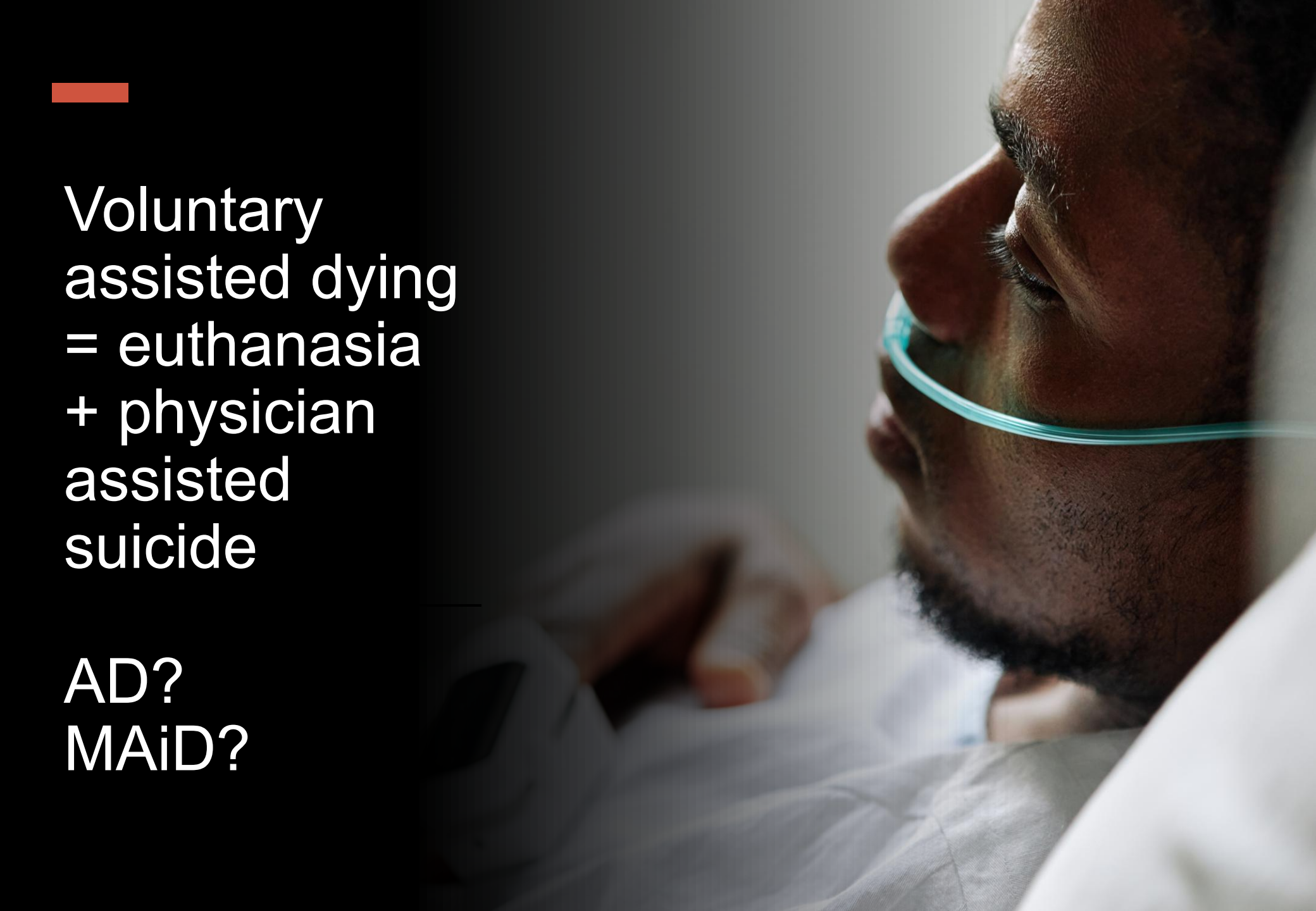
An act where a doctor intentionally ends the life of a person by the administration of drugs, at that person's voluntary and competent request.





PHYSICIAN ASSISTED SUICIDE

The situation where a doctor intentionally helps a person to commit suicide by providing drugs for self-administration, at that person's voluntary and competent request.



Voluntary
assisted dying
= euthanasia
+ physician
assisted
suicide

AD?
MAiD?

Not to be confused with...

- Withholding or withdrawing futile or burdensome treatment



Not to be confused with...

- Withholding or withdrawing futile or burdensome treatment
- Stopping life support



Not to be confused with...

- Withholding or withdrawing futile or burdensome treatment
- Stopping life support
- Symptom control





Morphine and
sedatives in
therapeutic
doses do not
shorten life

- Azouley (2011)
- Bengoechea et al (2010)
- Portenoy et al (2006)
- Good et al (2005)
- Sykes and Thorns (2003)
- Morita et al (2001)
- Thorns and Sykes (2000)
- Bercovitch et al (1999)
- Brescia et al (1992)
- etc

You shall not murder

Exodus 20:13

Matthew 19:18

Romans 13:9

Genesis 9:6

RASAH

‘The sixth commandment is perhaps best understood as stating that no human being may take a human life without divine approval...By including this prohibition against the taking of human life...YHWH underscores the idea that no human has the authority to destroy the life of another.’

Alexander, T. D., *Exodus* (AOTC 2; London: Apollos, 2017)

The death of Saul: 2 Samuel 1



Arguments for euthanasia

- Compassionate response to the suffering of the terminally ill
- Expression of autonomy



Arguments from autonomy

Christian autonomy (freedom) has limits

1 Corinthians 6:19



Following the suffering servant



Palliative Care: A Holistic Approach

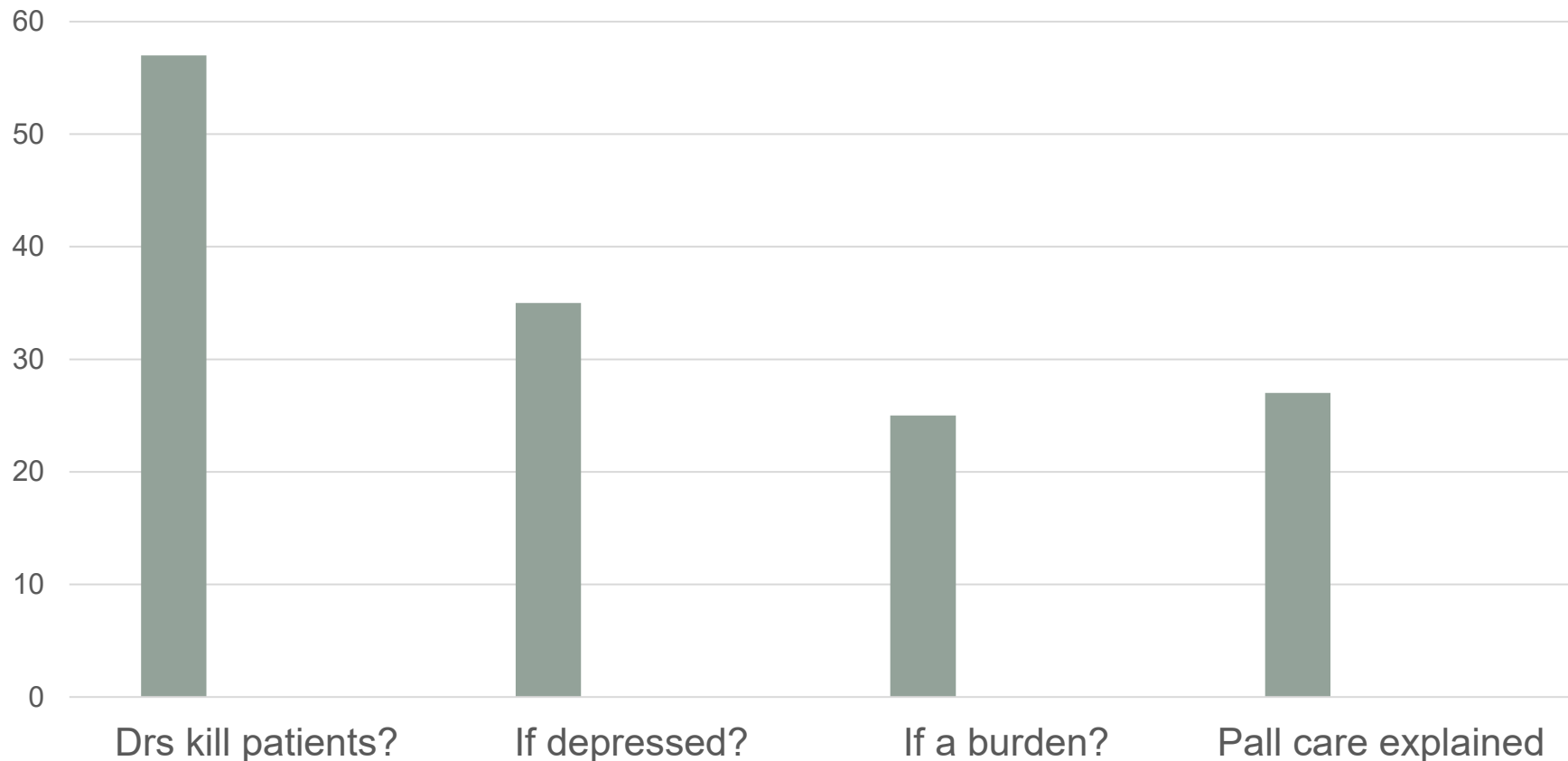


specialised care for the dying:

- affirms life
- regards dying as a normal process
- neither hastens nor postpones death
- provides symptom relief
- offers support for active living
- offers support to help families cope

Definition of World Health Organisation (WHO)
Sepúlveda et al (2002)

Euthanasia-free NZ 2019 poll



Euthanasia requests:

Usually for
psychological, spiritual
and social reasons

Uncommon

Misinterpreted

Desire for Control



Suffering is not a medical problem



VAD Law in Australia

Jurisdiction	Implemented	Prognosis	Suggest?	IV a choice?
Victoria*	2019	6-12 months*	No*	No
WA	2021	6-12 months	Drs and Nurse practitioners	Yes
Tas	2022	6-12 months	All health practitioners	Effectively yes
SA	31/1/2023	6-12 months	No	No
Qld	1/1/2023	12 months	Drs and nurse practitioners	Yes
NSW	28/11/2023	6-12 months	All healthcare workers and carers	Yes
ACT	3/11/2025	-	All healthcare workers	Yes

VAD Law in A.C.T.

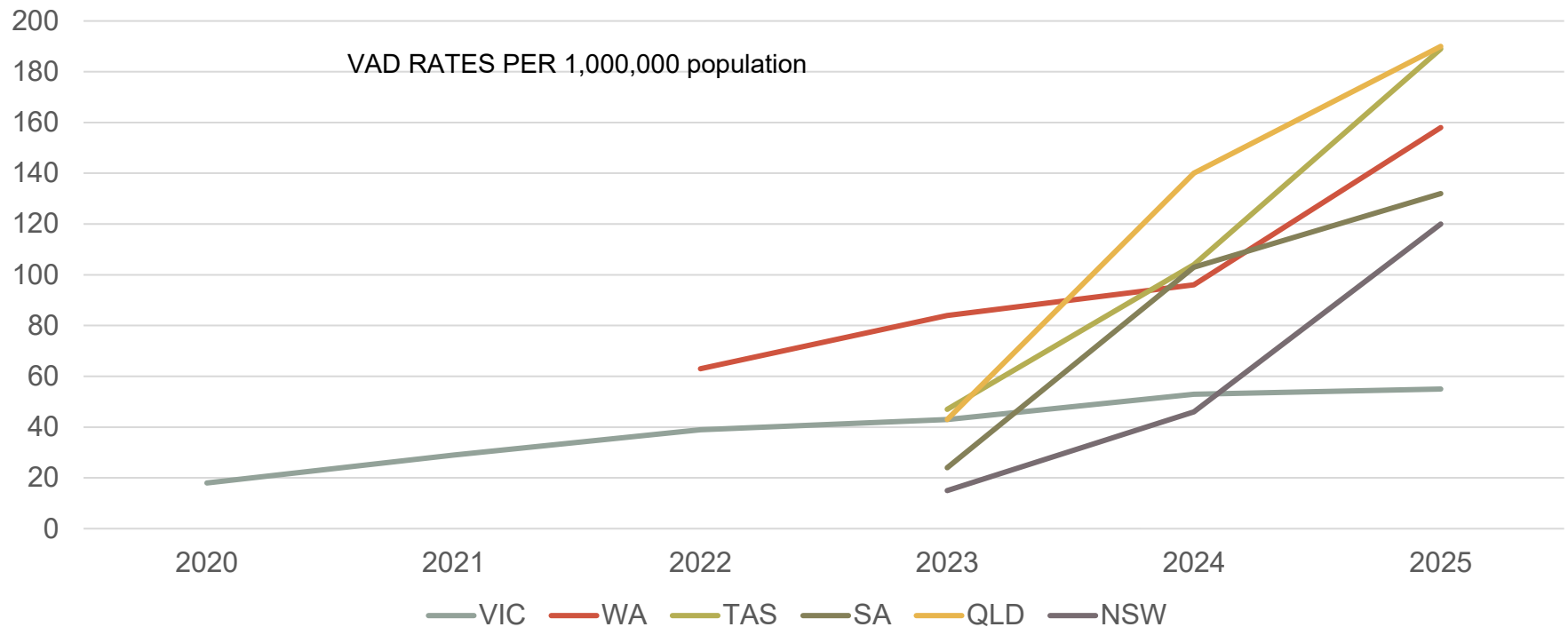
Eligibility criteria

- Adult > 18 years
- Mentally competent
- Resident 12 months (exemption available)
- Advanced progressive condition expected to cause death (no time frame)
- Experiencing or anticipating intolerable suffering (self-defined)
- Decision made voluntarily with no coercion

VAD Law in A.C.T.

- Mental competence is assumed unless proven otherwise
- No requirement to notify usual doctor
- No requirement to notify family
- It is an offence to induce patient to revoke request dishonestly or by coercion
- Cause of death on *Death Certificate* is not VAD

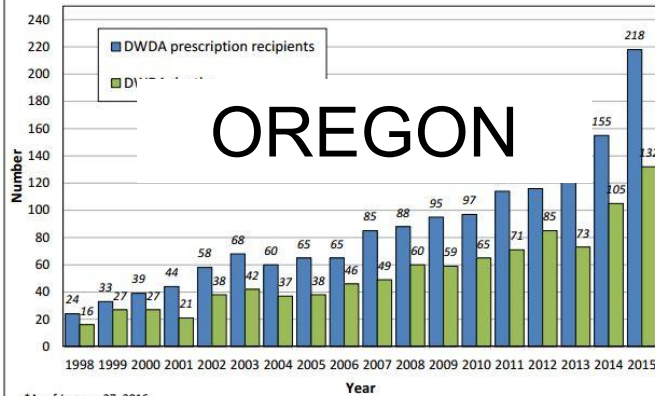
VAD RATES PER 1,000,000 POPULATION



International trends in assisted dying

- Increase in number of deaths
- Widening of eligibility criteria
- Reduction of safeguards
- Progressive devaluation of human life
- Increased pressure on doctors to provide
- Normalisation of 'death by appointment'

Figure 1: DWDA prescription recipients and deaths*, by year, Oregon, 1998-2015

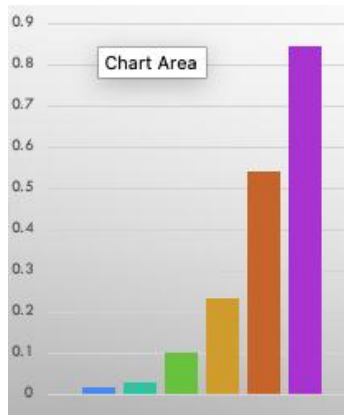


OREGON

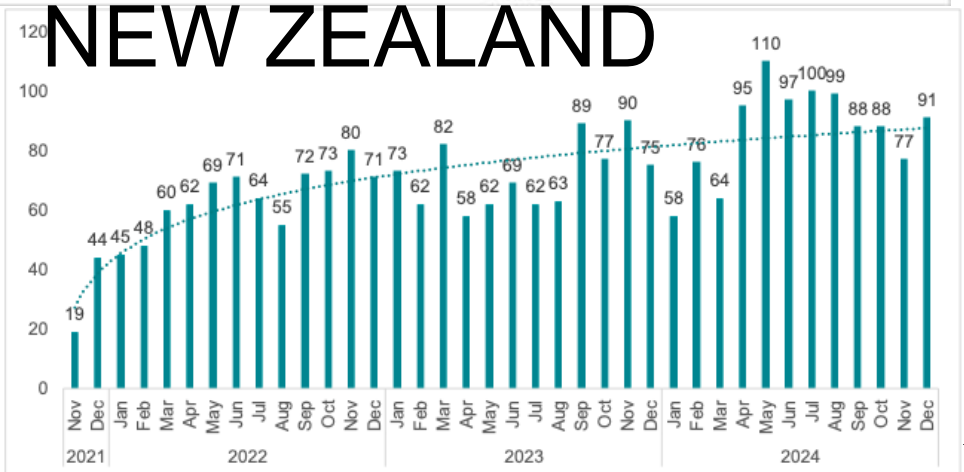
INCREASE IN NO. DEATHS



BELGIUM

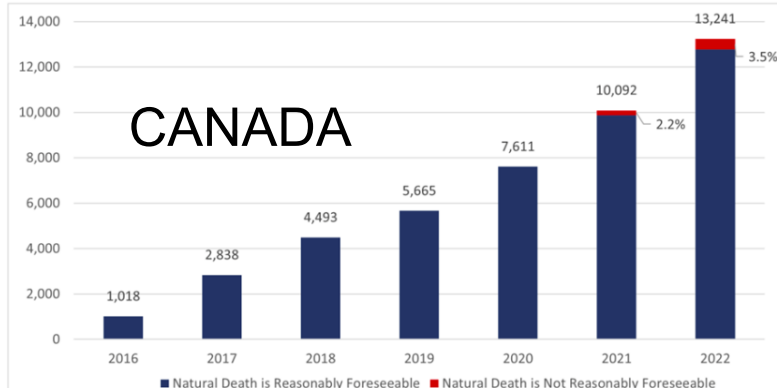


AUSTRALIA



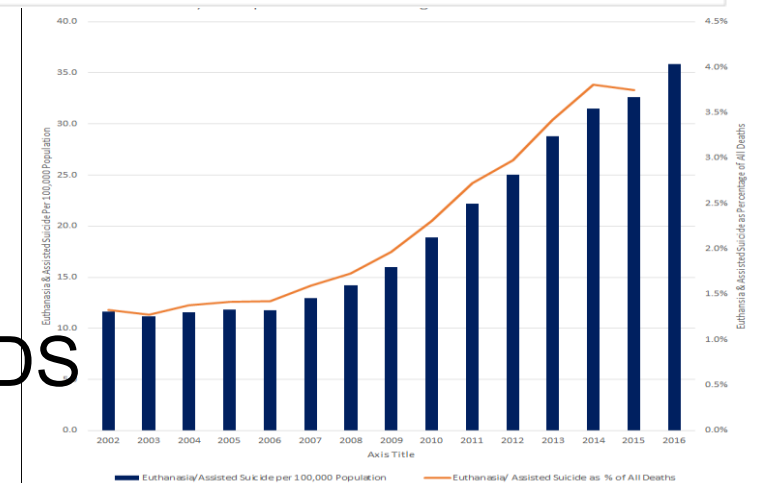
NEW ZEALAND

Chart 3.1: Total MAID Deaths in Canada, 2016 to 2022



CANADA

NETHERLANDS





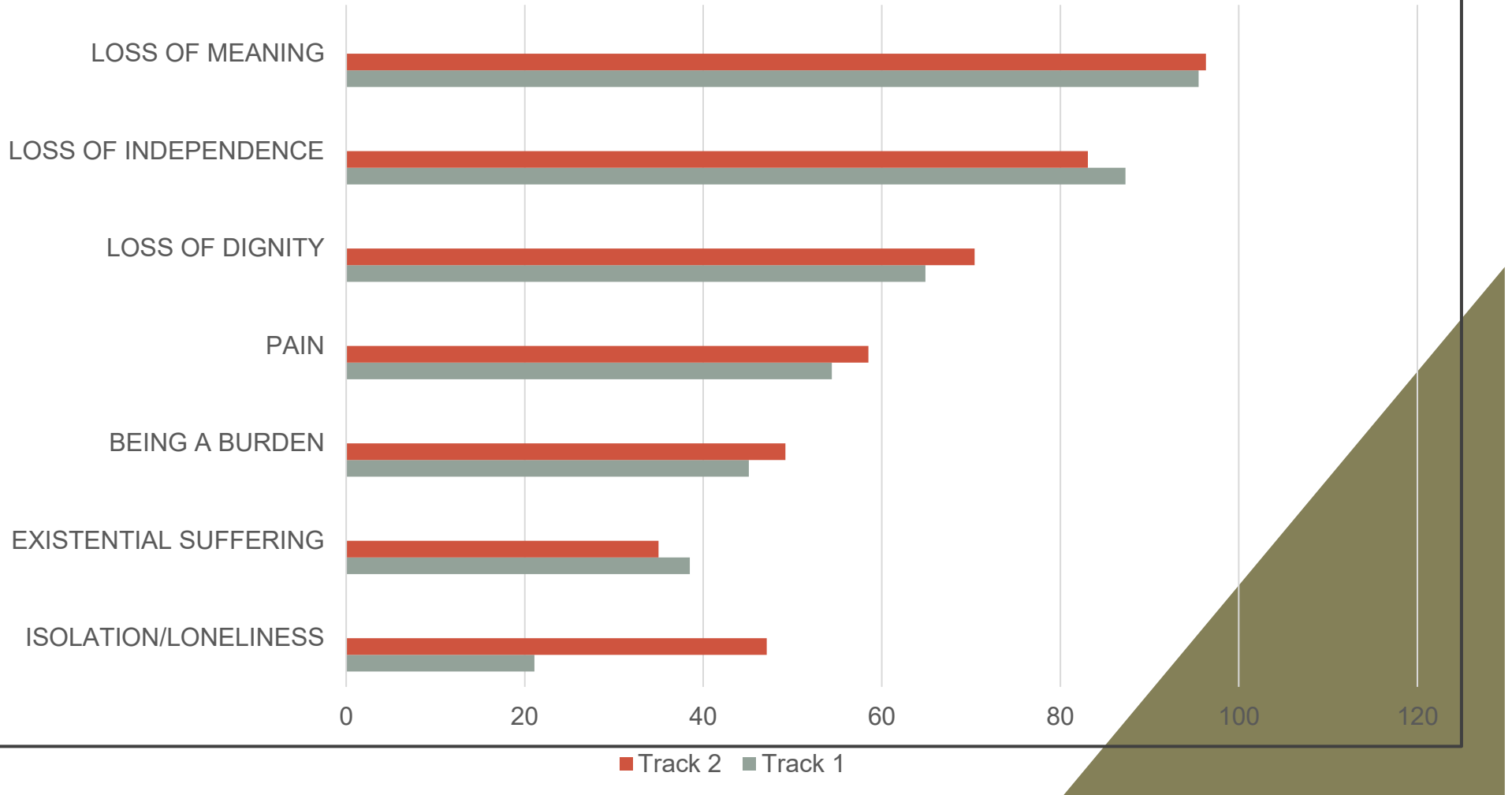
WIDENING OF ELIGIBILITY CRITERIA

REDUCTION OF SAFEGUARDS



PROGRESSIVE DEVALUING OF LIFE?

REASONS FOR MAID IN CANADA 2023



Loss of focus on basic patient care





INCREASED PRESSURE ON DOCTORS TO KILL PATIENTS

Violation of professional medical ethics

Attempted legitimisation of assisted death

Removal of conscientious objection clauses

Medical Assistance in Dying (MAiD) Activity Book

Welcome! These activities will
help you think about
Medical Assistance in Dying
by Someone in your life.

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NORMALISATION OF 'DEATH BY APPOINTMENT'

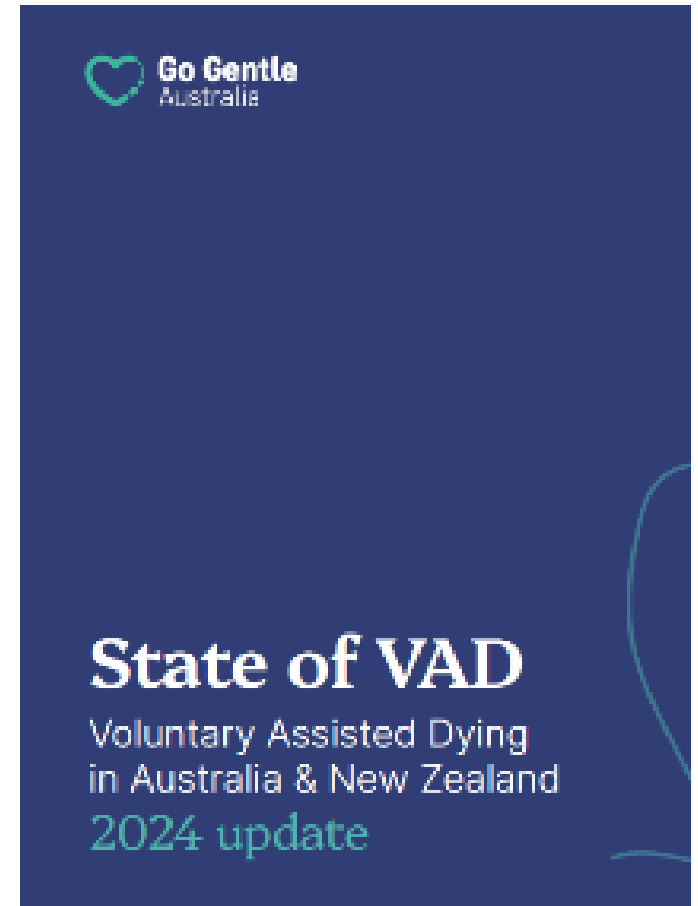
All is beauty

<http://glossyinc.com/2022/11/02/all-is-beauty/>



GG: recommended reforms

- **Streamline complex bureaucratic processes** to be less burdensome for dying people (eg fewer permits), integrate into high-quality palliative care standards
- **Remove the 'gag clause'**
- **Extend prognosis window** – 12 months
- **Remove residency rules**
- **Enable Telehealth** by amending Commonwealth law so those living outside Australia's major cities can discuss VAD via electronic communications and telehealth when needed
- **Grow the VAD health workforce** by allowing nurses to administer VAD
- **Address Aged Care Barriers** – provide clear guidance and support for faith-based aged care providers to facilitate access for residents
- **Fair Compensation** - ensure health professionals receive fair compensation for their time and skills and minimise costs for patients
- **National Consistency** – create a consistent, safe and accessible system across Australia





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