

Voluntary assisted dying in Queensland 2023–2024

A guide to the Queensland Voluntary Assisted Dying Review Board Annual Report 2023–2024

What is voluntary assisted dying?

Voluntary assisted dying gives people who meet eligibility criteria and who are suffering and dying the option to ask for medical help to end their life. It became available in Queensland on 1 January 2023, and has been accessed by people across the state, including people in regional, rural and remote areas.

Voluntary assisted dying is one of several choices a person may make towards the end of their life. Compassionate end-of-life care includes support and treatment that is respectful of a person's physical, psychological, emotional, social, cultural and spiritual needs. This care is provided by a range of healthcare workers and includes support for families and carers.

You can visit the Queensland Health voluntary assisted dying website for more information: www.health.qld.gov.au/vad.

How does a person access voluntary assisted dying?

A person may raise voluntary assisted dying with their doctor or other healthcare worker. A doctor or nurse practitioner may also start a conversation about voluntary assisted dying as a part of end-of-life discussions. At the same time, they will also let the person know about other treatment and support available to them, such as palliative care. Early conversations about voluntary assisted dying allow time for careful consideration by the person about what is right for them.

The law respects the rights of healthcare workers to not provide voluntary assisted dying, while making sure eligible people wanting to access it can do so. If a registered health practitioner is not comfortable discussing voluntary assisted dying, they have a legal obligation to advise where a person can get more information and support.

Queensland Voluntary Assisted Dying Support Service (QVAD Support)

QVAD Support is a statewide service that provides advice and support to Queenslanders about voluntary assisted dying and can help link a person with a voluntary assisted dying doctor.

QVAD Support contact information can be found at the end of this document.



The Review Board

The Voluntary Assisted Dying Review Board (Review Board) was established to ensure the safety and wellbeing of people who access voluntary assisted dying and the doctors and nurses who provide these services. Members of the Review Board review all voluntary assisted dying cases to ensure the process complied with the strict laws that are in place in Queensland. The Review Board is required to provide an annual report to the Minister for Health on the operation of voluntary assisted dying in Queensland.

Annual Report 2023–2024

This document is a guide to the Queensland Voluntary Assisted Dying Review Board Annual Report 2023–2024. It details information about activity from 1 July 2023 to 30 June 2024 in Queensland. For more detailed information please see the full annual report which is available on the Review Board publications webpage: www.health.qld.gov.au/vadreviewboard.

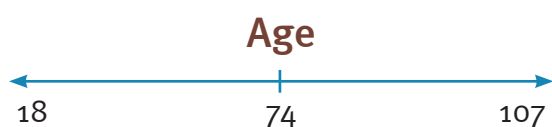
From 1 July 2023 to 30 June 2024, 1560 people started the voluntary assisted dying process.



■ 57% of these people were male.

■ 43% of these people were female.

No people identified as X or non-binary.



74 was the median age, the youngest person was 18 and the oldest person was 107.

3 in 4 people
were accessing palliative care.

Eligibility

There are strict eligibility criteria to access voluntary assisted dying in Queensland. A person must meet **all** eligibility criteria to access voluntary assisted dying:

1. Have an eligible condition that is:
 - advanced, progressive, and will cause death
 - expected to cause death within 12 months
 - causing suffering that the person considers to be intolerable.
2. Have decision-making capacity.
3. Be acting voluntarily and without coercion.
4. Be at least 18 years of age.
5. Fulfil Australian and Queensland residency requirements.

The person must be independently assessed for eligibility against these criteria by two doctors. These assessments are called a **first assessment** and a **consulting assessment**.

From 1 July 2023 to 30 June 2024, most people who completed these assessments were eligible for voluntary assisted dying.

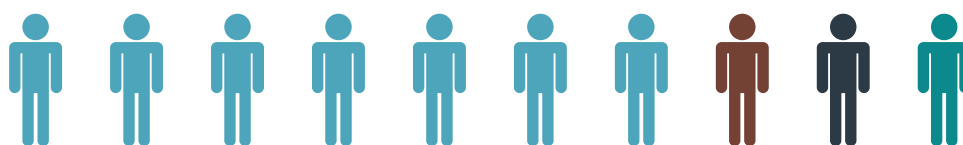
93% of people who completed a first assessment were eligible for voluntary assisted dying.

98% of people who completed a consulting assessment were eligible for voluntary assisted dying.

■ Eligible ■ Ineligible

Diagnosis

There are a range of eligible diagnoses for voluntary assisted dying. From 1 July 2023 to 30 June 2024:



- Most people (76%) accessing voluntary assisted dying had cancer.
- One in 10 people (9%) had a neurological disorder.
- One in 10 people (7%) had a respiratory disease.
- Other people (8%) had diagnoses such as kidney and liver disease.

Voluntary assisted dying deaths

An eligible person will talk with their coordinating doctor and decide how the substance will be administered. There are two methods: self-administration, where the person administers the substance themselves, and practitioner administration, where a doctor or nurse administers the substance.

From 1 July 2023 to 30 June 2024, 793 people died from administration of a voluntary assisted dying substance. Of these people,

Two thirds (532 people) died following practitioner administration of a voluntary assisted dying substance.

One third (261 people) died following self-administration of a voluntary assisted dying substance.

Other deaths

Not all people who are assessed as eligible will choose to administer the voluntary assisted dying substance and are content to know the option is available if they need it. Some people become rapidly unwell and die before the process can be completed. People may also lose decision-making capacity, which means they become ineligible to continue the voluntary assisted dying process.

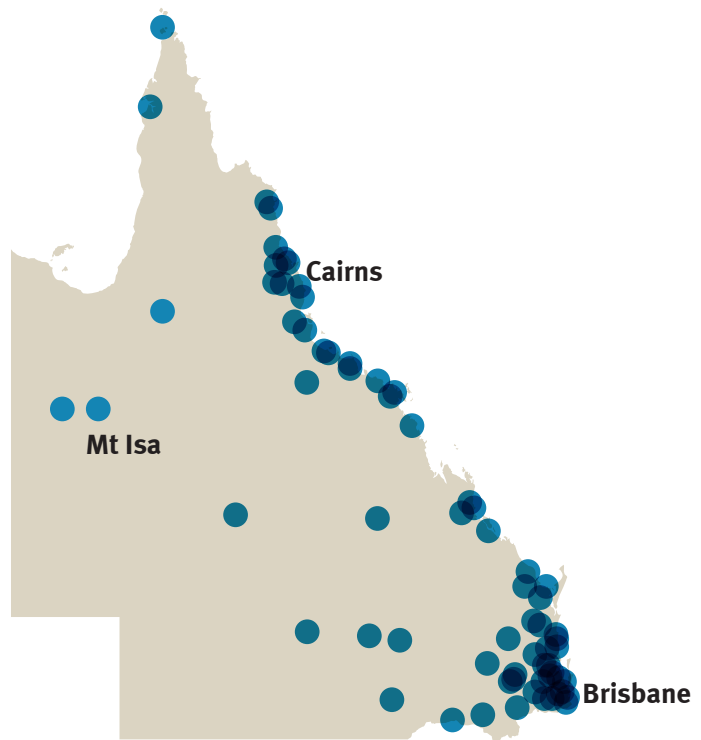
From 1 July 2023 to 30 June 2024, 451 people who were undertaking the voluntary assisted dying process died without administering the substance.

Authorised Practitioners

Only doctors and nurses who have had completed mandatory training and been approved by Queensland Health can participate in the voluntary assisted dying process. These healthcare workers are called “authorised practitioners”.

As of 30 June 2024, there were 381 authorised doctors and nurses in the voluntary assisted dying workforce in Queensland.

This map shows where these practitioners are located. Each circle represents one or more practitioners and locations are approximate.



Recommendations

The Review Board has made four recommendations in this annual report. These recommendations will support the continuous improvement and sustainable delivery of voluntary assisted dying in Queensland. They include improving healthcare workers’ awareness of the voluntary assisted dying process, reviewing the current pharmacy model and supporting research.

The Review Board has produced new resources to improve community awareness and understanding of voluntary assisted dying. These include a consumer resource and quarterly reports that provide updates. The resources can be found on the Review Board website: www.health.qld.gov.au/vadreviewboard.

More information about voluntary assisted dying

More information about the voluntary assisted dying process is available on the Queensland Health website: www.health.qld.gov.au/vad. QVAD Support can also provide advice and support.

Queensland Voluntary Assisted Dying Support Service (QVAD Support)



Phone: 1800 431 371 | Email: QVADSupport@health.qld.gov.au

Hours of operation: 8.30am to 4pm, Mon to Fri (excluding public holidays)

Help in your language

For help reading this information call:



- Multicultural Connect Line free hotline number: 1300 079 020
- Interpreter Service (Help with English): 13 QGOV (13 74 68) and ask for an interpreter
- Translating and Interpreting Service: 13 14 50