

Thinking it Through:

Information about assisted dying for adults with terminal illness.

We wrote this guide for adults with terminal illness who are thinking about assisted dying. It's designed to help you think about what you want. We've included information our research participants told us was or would've been helpful.

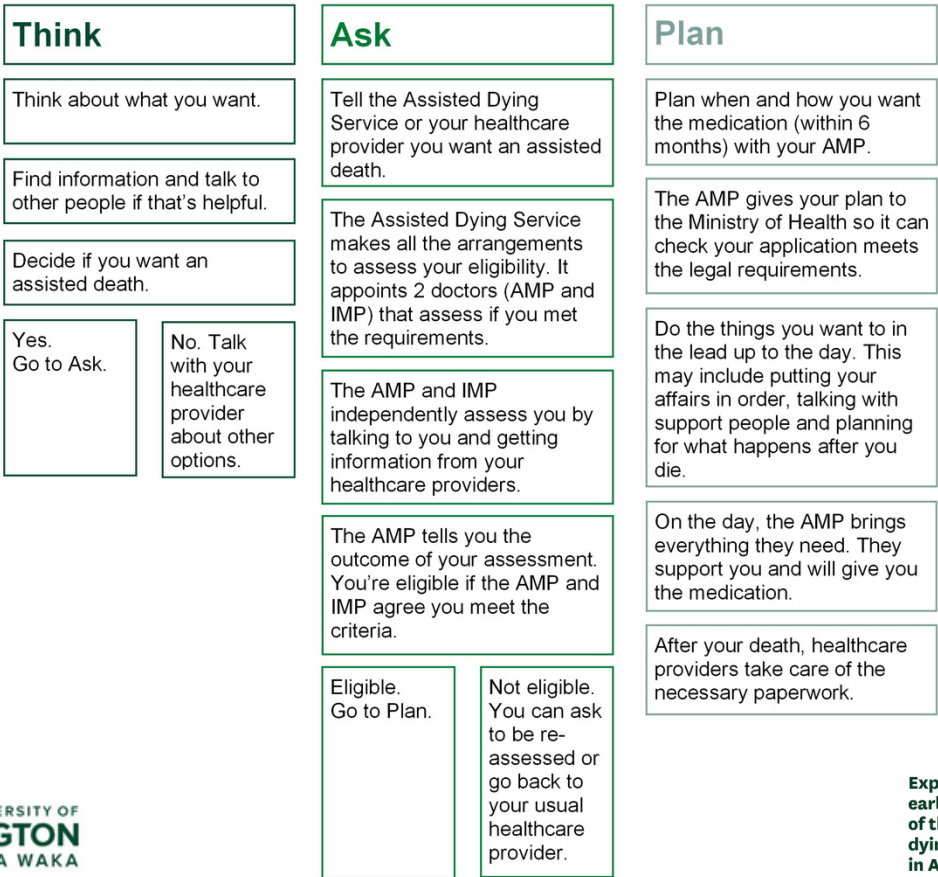
Our participants were people with terminal illness, their support people, and assisted dying providers. We sincerely thank them for generously sharing their experiences. Their openness and insights have been invaluable.

This guide may also be helpful for support people. Support people can ask for information for you, be your contact person during the application process, and be involved in the assessment conversations. They can't make decisions on your behalf.

We've included quotes from our participants because they said it can be helpful to know about other people's experiences. We have their okay to do this, but we gave them new names to protect their privacy. Skip the quotes if you don't want to read them.

We've listed common terms below and put links to support and more information (including about our research) at the end.

We've put information into the main stages of the assisted dying process. Start wherever you want. There's no right way or length of time to think about, ask for, or plan an assisted death.





Common terms

Assisted Dying

Assisted dying is when an eligible person is helped to end their life by taking or being given specific medication. It's different to refusing treatment.

Under the End of Life Choice Act 2019, a person must meet all these criteria to be eligible:

- Aged 18 years or older
- A New Zealand citizen or permanent resident
- Suffering from a terminal illness that is likely to end their life within 6 months
- Experiencing a serious decline in physical capability that cannot be reversed
- Experiencing unbearable suffering that cannot be relieved in a way they can tolerate
- Competent to make an informed decision about assisted dying.

AMP

Attending medical practitioner. They're the main assisted dying doctor. They'll assess if you meet the requirements for an assisted death. If you're eligible and consent to an assisted death, they will help you plan your death and be with you on the day.

IMP

Independent medical practitioner. They're the second doctor who assesses if you meet the requirements for an assisted death. They must do this independently of the AMP.

Assisted Dying Service

Health New Zealand Te Whatu Ora runs the Service.

You can contact the Service on 0800 223 852 or at AssistedDying@tewhatauora.govt.nz.

The clinical advisors (nurses) provide information and support to help people (and their support people) with the assisted dying process and appoint the AMP and IMP. You can contact the Service if you have any questions or concerns about the process.

SCENZ Group

Support and Consultation for End of Life in New Zealand Group. Sometimes the Assisted Dying Service is referred to as SCENZ. SCENZ is a committee established under the End of Life Choice Act 2019. SCENZ keeps the lists of health professionals who can provide assisted dying services. The AMP and IMP come from these lists.

Registrar Assisted Dying

The Registrar Assisted Dying is the person who checks all legal requirements have been met and approves applications.



Think

People have different knowledge of, views on, and experience with assisted dying. It may help to think about what you know, and what questions you have. Talk with the Assisted Dying Service or your usual healthcare provider if you have questions.

Will my doctor tell me about assisted dying?

No. By law, you must raise it first.

How long do I have to decide?

There is no set time. But, you must be competent on the day of the assisted death. That means you can understand the information, hold on to it and use it to make and communicate your decision. Reports show formally applying and finding out about eligibility from the AMP takes on average 15 days. It will depend on your circumstances.

Can I change my mind?

Yes, up to when you're about to have the medication. You can delay the date by up to 6 months or stop.

Can I pick when, where, how and who is there?

The AMP must be there. You can choose who else you want with you. It's OK if you just want it to be you and the AMP.

Assisted Dying involves you having a certain medication. Under the law, we can't say what the medication is. You can choose to swallow it or have it injected through an IV (a small tube put into your body). If you have a port or peg, you can ask the AMP about using that. The AMP will help you make an informed decision by talking with you about how you can have the medication, what you want and any concerns you have. You can take time to decide how you want to have the medication.

You need to pick a date that is no more than 6 months after the AMP tells you you're eligible. The date can be brought closer or put off for up to another 6 months.

You can generally pick the location. If you live anywhere other than your own home, you should ask the owner or service provider if you can have an assisted death there. Some people choose to die in hospital. Public hospitals must allow assisted dying onsite. The AMP must tell the Ministry of Health when and how. This is so the medication can be arranged and the Ministry can check your application meet the requirements of the End of Life Choice Act 2019.

The AMP will talk with you if there are any concerns.



Do I have to tell people I'm thinking about an assisted death?

No. It's up to you if you want to tell anyone. Our research participants said it was helpful to talk with others and to have their support. They also told us that it might be hard to know what other people think about assisted dying before you talk with them. People's experiences, beliefs, and circumstances can affect what they think and feel about assisted dying. Some people might be supportive and others might not.

It may help you to talk with the Assisted Dying Service, your usual healthcare provider or a counsellor about telling people you're thinking about assisted dying.

Can I become an organ and/or tissue donor after an assisted death?

Yes, donation may be possible through an established donation pathway.

Some people find donation to be a meaningful part of their end-of-life planning, including the opportunity to help others. Organ Donation New Zealand (ODNZ) can provide all the information and support you need to help you explore this option, so you can make the decision that is right for you, without pressure.

To find out more, contact ODNZ on 0800 436 667 or www.donor.co.nz.

How much does assisted dying cost?

The Ministry of Health funds the assisted dying process. You may have to pay healthcare costs not directly related to assisted dying. Ask the Assisted Dying Service if you're unsure.

I have life insurance. Will an assisted death affect the ability to claim?

No. This is covered in the End of Life Choice Act 2019.

Does an assisted death hurt?

The AMP will talk with you about the process which is designed to be peaceful and painless.

Patrick, person using assisted dying - *"I can barely walk, our house is a fair way from the street... if my dogs had bone cancer, I wouldn't make them suffer horribly to the point where they expired... the notion that there is choice for me is just magnificent."*

Warwick, person using assisted dying - *"Because there is no other outcome. There's no chance of a cure. You might delay it for a month or something. That's all... The pain takes over."*

Suzi, person using assisted dying - *"Yeah, it's been difficult. But I think there's been a bonus in that because I've had an opportunity to do things and say things to people that, had I died quickly, I wouldn't have had that chance."*

Kerry, family member - *"It took away the trauma element. It's usually the shock and the 'I wish I had'... I personally think it was Dad's last gift to me... We all got to say what we wanted to say."*



Ask

You can ask at any point if you have a terminal illness, even if you only have a short time to live. How long the application process takes depends on your circumstances.

Who to ask

You can ask the Assisted Dying Service or your healthcare provider. Contact the Assisted Dying Service on 0800 223 852 or AssistedDying@tewhatauora.govt.nz.

If you phone, you will reach the Health NZ call centre. Ask for the Assisted Dying Service. The call centre passes on your contact details. The Assisted Dying Service will call you back.

How to ask

Under the law, you must ask yourself to ensure you're not being pressured to have an assisted death. It's helpful to say 'assisted dying' or 'euthanasia' so it's clear what you're asking for.

A doctor can write to the Assisted Dying Service to confirm you asked for assisted dying unprompted and this can start your application.

Your support person can call the Assisted Dying Service but you will need to tell the Service you want assisted dying to start your application. You can ask using whatever means you use to communicate, including using an interpreter.

Our research participants who were support people told us they held back from helping because they worried anything they did or said could be seen as pressure. It's OK for them to get information for you, be your contact person during the application process, and to be involved in the assessments. They can't make decisions on your behalf. You can talk with the doctor you ask or the Assisted Dying Service about how your support people can help you without it being seen as pressure.

If you ask your doctor, they must give you specific information about your illness and other end-of-life options. They'll encourage you to talk with your support people, but they must tell you that you don't have to.

By law, if your healthcare provider can't help you because they don't agree with or provide assisted dying, they must tell you that you can contact the Assisted Dying Service.

What happens after you ask

There's an assessment to determine if you meet the legal requirements for an assisted death. The Assisted Dying Services organises the process and appoints the AMP and IMP. A clinical advisor (nurse) from the Service contacts you to get this started.

If you have any concerns about the AMP, IMP or the assessment process, you can contact the Assisted Dying Registrar through the Assisted Dying Service.



The assessment process

Part 1: AMP

They'll need information from you and your doctor and may talk with your support people, if you agree. They'll visit you. Support person/people can be there when the AMP visits you. Ask the AMP if you're unsure how your support person/people are allowed to be involved.

Part 2: IMP

If the AMP says you meet the legal requirements, the IMP assesses you. They must do this separately to the AMP, but they'll follow the same process.

If the AMP or IMP is unsure you're competent to decide about assisted dying, a Psychiatrist will assess you. You must be competent to have an assisted death.

The AMP will tell you the outcome of the assessment

You can have an assisted death if both the AMP and IMP say you meet the criteria. If you don't meet the criteria, you return to the care of your usual healthcare provider. Some people seek support as this can feel disappointing. See support resources on the last page.

What happens if I don't have or I lose capacity?

You must be competent for the whole assisted dying process. You cannot consent to assisted dying in an advance care plan or advance directive. Talk with your AMP about what will happen on the day if you're not competent to consent.

Can I apply again if I'm declined?

Yes you can ask to be re-assessed. You can apply a third time, if there's evidence your clinical condition has deteriorated. Each time different AMPs and IMPs will assess you.

Will my usual medication affect the assessment?

Talk to the AMP or your usual healthcare provider about this.

Can I still see my usual healthcare provider during the assisted dying process?

Yes. Your usual healthcare provider is responsible for all your health care other than assisted dying. This includes any pain medication.

John, family member - *"One of the things we needed to know was actually, how does it work operationally? And who do you ask? How do you go about it?"*

Diane, person using assisted dying - *"I asked my GP about it in August 2022 when I got my prognosis. They told me I had a year if I was lucky. I asked my GP for the details of contacting the service but didn't actually do anything with it until October."*

Patrick, person using assisted dying - *"So [my doctor] can't bring it up. I didn't know that I had to bring it up in the way that I needed to... So we had this strange conversation where everyone knew what we were going to talk about, but no one could talk about it. Then he said, well, you know, you just need to ring the 0800 number and, you know, start make the ball roll and they'll call you back... The webpage is full of words... it felt like it was gonna be more involved than ringing 0800 number. Talk to a person, get a booking, person turns up assesses me, talk to me. You know we're off and that's really all it was."*



Plan

People approach planning in different ways. Some have clear ideas, while others take it step by step. Support is available to you and those around you. You do not have to navigate this alone.

When planning starts

The AMP helps you plan. This starts when they tell you that you're eligible. They'll talk with you about who you want at your death, the date, where you want to die and how you want the medication administered. The AMP gives this information to the Registrar at the Ministry of Health to complete your application. It takes at least 2 week days for the Registrar to approve your application.

It usually takes one week to arrange the medication.

You can ask your AMP questions and talk to them about any worries, such as how your usual medication may impact your ability to consent on the day.

Who you want involved

There's no right approach. You might want to think about:

- Who you want to tell and how you'll approach these conversations
- Who you want to see on the day
- Who you want there when you die
- Communication between you, the AMP and your support people
- What you'll do if your support people are upset you're having an assisted death.

Your support people may need support. Some resources are at the end of this guide.

When

Setting the date can be difficult. Some people know the date they want. Others want to discuss it with their support people or take time to decide. Your AMP can help you decide.

Your date must be within 6 months. You can bring it forward with Ministry of Health approval or delay it for up to another 6 months.

Where

You may want to die somewhere important to you, such as at home. Some people choose to die in hospital. Public hospitals must allow assisted dying onsite. Aged Residential Care and Hospices may not allow assisted dying onsite. Talk to your provider and AMP to ensure your location is OK, fits with what you want to happen after your death, and if transport is available.



On the day

The AMP will be there and guide what happens. They'll bring everything they need, and must have your consent if they bring another healthcare provider.

You can ask questions, pause, or change your mind before the medication is given. There are no consequences for you, your support people or the AMP if you change your mind.

People have told us the process is quick and peaceful. The first medication will make you fall asleep. Depending on how the medication is given, it'll usually take a few minutes for you to die.

Your support people can be with you at all times if that's what you and they want.

After your death

Healthcare providers look after the legal and reporting requirements, including the Medical Certificate of Cause of Death. 'Assisted Death' will be on the Death Certificate.

Your support people may need support. Some resources are at the end of this guide.

Warwick, person using assisted dying - *"We had to put in a provisional date when you first apply. It's less than two months now. I can take that back or bring it forward... Basically what we've come down to is immediate family."*

Patrick, person using assisted dying - *"I think the other big one is discussing it with the family and kids. They weren't easy conversations, but I had everybody just totally supportive of it."*

Frances, person using assisted dying - *"I'm surrounded by bush, so I knew I wanted to die here, but not inside the house for my husband's sake... one of the reasons I wanted it to be sooner than later is because I know the brain processing is deteriorating rapidly... But to me it's been a private decision. Very personal journey and I don't need other people's emotional reactions to it."*

Thinking it Through: Support and more information



Professional support

- Your GP Practice may be able to refer you to some funded or subsidised counselling sessions, depending on where you live.
- You can use your employer's Employee Assisted Programme (EAP).
- There are also specialised assisted dying counsellors you can find online.
- Call [1737](tel:1737) for a government funded, free, confidential and 24/7 mental health support.
- [Tend](#) - Book a free 30-minute video call with a mental health clinician. No referral or enrolment needed. Open to all NZ residents 16+, 8am - 8pm weekdays.

Peer support

- [Lean On Me](#) – NZ and Australian peer support network for people and their supporters going through and after assisted dying.
- [MAID Family Support Society](#) (Canada)
- [Willow Family Peer Support Group](#) (Australia)

Written resources

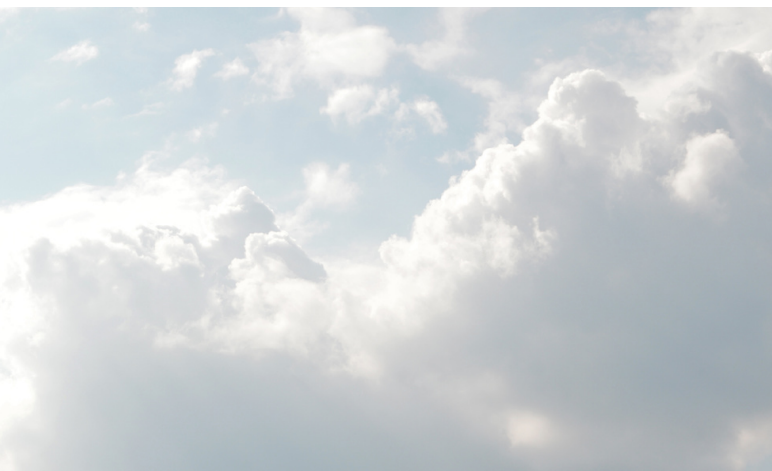
- [Assisted dying grief resource](#) from this research
- [How to talk to tamariki/children and māātāhi/young people about assisted dying - A guide for Mātua/parents and caregivers](#) by Kenzies Gift.
- [The many faces of MAID: What to Expect When Someone You Know Chooses Medical Assistance in Dying](#) by Cynthia Clark and Carol Cram.

More information

- [Assisted Dying](#) – Health NZ Te Whatu Ora
- [Assisted Dying Service](#) – Health NZ Te Whatu Ora
- [Assisted Dying](#) – Ministry of Health
- [Assisted Dying: People's rights under the Code of Rights](#)

Your rights

You're covered by the Code of Health and Disability Consumers' Rights. If you have concerns during the process, talk with your healthcare provider or the Assisted Dying Service if it's urgent. You can also contact the Health and Disability Commissioner's Advocacy Service on 0800 555 050 or advocacy@advocacy.org.nz.



Ethics approval statement: The ethical aspects of this study have been approved by the Northern A Health and Disability Ethics Committee through the full review pathway [ref 2023 EXP 18493].

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Research: Please see the [project website](#) for further information and resources. Information is up to date as of July 2026.

