

MEDIA RELEASE

Monday, 29 September

NT Lagging Behind on Voluntary Assisted Dying: Time to Act

In 1995, the Northern Territory made history as the first jurisdiction in the world to legalise voluntary euthanasia. Today, it stands as the last jurisdiction in Australia without a voluntary assisted dying (VAD) law.

Every Australian state and the ACT have legislated VAD. Yet in 2025, Territorians are still denied the same end-of-life choices available to other Australians. It is unjust and deeply concerning that NT residents are treated as second-class citizens by a government whose leader has publicly stated these laws are “not a priority.”

This week, Go Gentle Australia’s founding director Andrew Denton will lead two free community panel discussions co-hosted with COTA NT, offering Territorians the chance to learn more about the campaign to bring VAD legislation to the Territory. The events will explore what’s next for the NT, why this reform matters, and how the community can help drive change.

Andrew Denton said: “There’s a real opportunity to learn from other jurisdictions and to craft a compassionate, workable law, based on the successful Australian model and designed for the NT.

“But let’s be clear: while these laws were enacted by parliaments, they didn’t come just from politicians. They came from people - families, advocates, communities, health professionals - who had seen the unanswerable suffering of people they loved and cared for, and who demanded change.

“That’s why we’re running a public campaign, to remind the NT government that Territorians deserve the same rights as every other Australian. And to remind the people of the Territory that they have the power to make change happen.”

COTA NT has been a vocal advocate for VAD legislation, working alongside national and Territory-based organisations to push for reform. “Thirty years ago, the Northern Territory was brave and innovative and introduced Voluntary Assisted Dying laws with the Rights of the Terminally Ill. This was negated by the Federal Government in 1997,

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and now after being the first, we are still waiting – how much longer?” said Sue Shearer, CEO of COTA NT. “Territorians have the democratic right to choose where they live, who they vote for and who they choose to live with, but we still do not have a choice on how we wish to exit this life. It is well overdue for Territorians to have the choice that every other Australian has.”

The NT was once a global pioneer. The Rights of the Terminally Ill Act 1995 was groundbreaking. But its legacy was cut short when unprecedented federal interference overturned the Act, stripping Territories of their power to legislate on euthanasia. That power was only restored in 2022 and was quickly used by the ACT to create their own VAD law.

In 2023 the NT government appointed an Expert Advisory Panel which, after extensive community consultation, recommended the drafting of VAD legislation. However, the newly elected CLP government chose not to act on the findings and instead announced further consultation.

Mr Denton urged the NT government to cease delaying and to put forward VAD legislation to bring the Territory in line with the rest of Australia.

“There is now a mountain of evidence from around Australia to show that VAD laws work, safely and as intended,” he said. “Every day this law is delayed, more terminally ill Territorians and their families are forced to suffer, without choice or dignity at the end of life. Dying people don’t have time to wait. It’s long past time this law was written.”

Go Gentle founder and broadcaster Andrew Denton will lead two community panel discussions co-hosted with COTA NT, spotlighting the campaign to bring the Territory in line with the rest of the nation on voluntary assisted dying (VAD).

Tuesday 30 September, 5.30pm to 7.30pm

Wednesday 1 October, 9am to 11am

Where: Darwin International Tennis Centre

Registration essential via the link

<https://events.humanitix.com/vadnt>

Media contacts

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