



**VOLUNTARY EUTHANASIA SOCIETY NEW ZEALAND INC**  
**PO Box 89046 Torbay Auckland 0742 Tel 09 215 4964 [www.ves.org.nz](http://www.ves.org.nz)**

### **Statement by the Voluntary Euthanasia Society NZ August 2015**

#### **WOULD THE LEGALISATION OF PHYSICIAN ASSISTED DYING (PAD) BE A MAJOR THREAT TO DISABLED PEOPLE?**

Many disabled individuals and disabled people-led organisations oppose the legalisation of assisted dying, as they fear the consequences that it may have for people with disabilities. They argue that it will make people with disabilities feel obliged to end their own lives so as not to be a burden on family, friends, and society. Some go as far as to liken physician assisted dying to eugenics movements of the past.

The Voluntary Euthanasia Society NZ (VESNZ) does not share these views on assisted dying. They amount to saying that members of the disabled community have such a low sense of self worth that the availability of assisted dying would make them feel obliged to end their lives in order to avoid being a burden on others. There is no justification for projecting that view onto an entire category of society.

Disabled people have the same rights to dignity and autonomy as non-disabled people. Disabled people can also suffer from terminal illnesses and conditions with irreversible and unbearable hopeless suffering.

Legalising assisted dying generally is unlikely to exacerbate disenfranchisement of disabled people. To the contrary, the process of legalisation would have great benefits. This is because it would bring society's attitudes of discrimination towards disabled people into the public consciousness through debate in parliament and the media.

Disabled people are currently more at risk from suicide-related harm than if assisted dying were legal.

Conflating the issues of disability discrimination and assisted dying is not useful for either disabled people, or for competent people (disabled or otherwise) who are suffering from a terminal illness or a condition with irreversible and unbearable hopeless suffering, and are seeking the right to choose assistance to die.

Many disabled people value equally their right to live and right to choose to end life in the case of acute suffering. In a position where suffering was intolerable, and assisted dying was available, certain disabled people would want the same right to choose to end suffering as anyone else.

A society should not deny one right by promoting another.

**The above document was written by Phillip Patston, Managing Director of Diversity New Zealand Ltd for VESNZ**

Dr Jack Havill

President of the Voluntary Euthanasia Society NZ (End-of-life Choice)

[jhavill@wave.co.nz](mailto:jhavill@wave.co.nz)

130 Mahoe St Hamilton 3206

021330255