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AUSTRALIAN CATHOLIC BISHOPS CONFERENCE CATHOLIC HEALTH AUSTRALIA

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Help for those accompanying Catholics facing end-of-life decisions

Australia's Catholic bishops have released a new document to guide priests, chaplains and pastoral workers who are asked to provide pastoral support to Catholics who are considering accessing the Voluntary Assisted Dying (VAD) scheme.

The *Companion Guide* has been written as a tool to help Catholics reflect and learn from *To Witness and to Accompany with Christian Hope*, a document endorsed by the bishops in November 2023.

To Witness and to Accompany with Christian Hope was produced in the wake of the Voluntary Assisted Dying legalisation in all Australian states.

"This is a timely resource which offers guidance for carers, chaplains, family and friends of the sick and the dying," said Bishop Tim Harris, the bishop delegate for the Euthanasia Taskforce.

"In challenging circumstances, it is important for those caring for the sick and dying to have access to compassionate and relevant pastoral advice and spiritual support which this resource provides.

"The Church continues to respect the dignity of the person especially when they are at their most vulnerable. This guide supports and assists those facing difficult and challenging circumstances at the end of life."

In preparing the original document, the bishops consulted widely with a range of people including church leaders and health professionals. The bishops have also worked with the Dicastery for the Doctrine of the Faith.

Catholic Health Australia, the peak body representing 80 public and private hospitals and 350 aged care facilities, says governments must invest more in palliative care services.

"When it comes to end-of-life, our members choose to specialise in palliative care," said CEO Jason Kara.

“We know that a large majority of Australians support government investment in palliative care, but chronic funding shortfalls are limiting access to quality care particularly in rural and regional locations.

“Without quality and accessible palliative care, there is a real risk that some patients decide to explore the option of ending their own lives when they may not otherwise have done so.”

One of the many reasons individuals seek out Catholic healthcare services is due to its focus on pastoral care in the form of accompaniment, conversations, prayer and spiritual guidance for patients and their friends and family.

The Companion Guide can be found [here](#).