



Practitioner administration witness responsibilities

This fact sheet provides information about the responsibilities of a witness to practitioner administration under the *Voluntary Assisted Dying Act 2021 (SA)*.

If a person is not physically able to self-administer or digest the voluntary assisted dying medication, they may be able to have the voluntary assisted dying medication administered to them by their doctor, also known as practitioner administration.

The medication can only be administered to a person in the presence of a witness.

Who can witness practitioner administration?

To be eligible to act as witness you must be:

- aged 18 years or older
- acting independently of the person's Coordinating Medical Practitioner.

Acting independently of the Coordinating Medical Practitioner means that you must:

- not be a family member of the practitioner
- not be employed or engaged under a contract for services by the Coordinating Medical Practitioner.

What do I need to witness?

You must be physically present to witness both:

- the patient's request for administration of the medication
- the administration of the medication by the Coordinating Medical Practitioner.

Request for administration

The patient must make a personal administration request to their Coordinating Medical Practitioner in your presence.

This request can be verbal, by gesture, or by other means of communication.

Both you and the Coordinating Medical Practitioner must be satisfied that all the below criteria are met:

- the person appeared to have decision-making capacity in relation to voluntary assisted dying at the time of making their administration request.
- the person appeared to be acting voluntarily and without coercion.
- the person's request to access voluntary assisted dying appeared to be enduring.



Administering the medication

As witness you will need to be present when the Coordinating Medical Practitioner administers the voluntary assisted dying medication to the person. The medication can be administered either enterally (into the digestive system) or intravenously (injecting directly into veins) depending on the type of administration route mentioned on the issued permit.

Time for the medication to take effect differs on a case-by-case basis. Death can occur within:

- 10 -15 minutes if the medication is administered by a practitioner intravenously
- If the medication is administered by a practitioner enterally, death can occur as for intravenous administration or can take many hours.
- The patient will fall asleep quickly in both scenarios and will be unaware.

You will know the person has died if:

- they cannot be roused
- they stop breathing
- they have no heartbeat or pulse
- their pupils are fixed staring straight ahead.

Certification

You and the Coordinating Medical Practitioner must each complete and sign a Practitioner Administration Form to certify that:

- the person appeared to have decision-making capacity in relation to voluntary assisted dying at the time of making their administration request.
- the person appeared to be acting voluntarily and without coercion.
- the person's request to access voluntary assisted dying appeared to be enduring
- the Coordinating Medical Practitioner administered the voluntary assisted dying medication to the patient.

Additional support for witness

Being present for someone's death can be a positive experience but may be confronting for some.

Consider organising additional support for yourself or others present who may become distressed at the time of death. You can get support from the SA Voluntary Assisted Dying Care Navigator Service ,a Voluntary Assisted Dying Local Health Network Liaison Officer or other external sources.

Support

Some people may find issues relating to voluntary assisted dying concerning or distressing.

If you need to talk to someone, these services provide telephone support 24 hours a day, 7 days a week:

- visit the [Lifeline website](#) or call [13 11 14](#).
- visit our [Bereavement Portal](#) website.
- visit the [SA Health mental health services](#) webpage.
- call the Mental Health Triage Service on [13 14 65](#).
- Call the [Kids Helpline](#) on [1800 551 800](#).

Contact us

For more information about voluntary assisted dying in South Australia visit www.sahealth.sa.gov.au/vad.

Specialist services are available to support access to and provide information about voluntary assisted dying to people making decisions at end of life, their family, friends and carers, health practitioners and service providers.

South Australian Voluntary Assisted Dying Care Navigator Service (SAVAD-CNS)

For support to access voluntary assisted dying contact:

Email: Health.VADCareNavigators@sa.gov.au

Phone: [0403 087 390](tel:0403087390)

Hours: Monday to Friday, 9am to 5pm

South Australian Voluntary Assisted Dying Pharmacy Service (SAVAD-PS)

For queries related to the supply, administration or disposal of voluntary assisted dying medication contact:

Email: Health.VADPharmacy@sa.gov.au

Phone: [\(08\) 7326 1746](tel:0873261746)

Hours: Monday to Friday, 9am to 5pm

South Australian Voluntary Assisted Dying Review Board

For any feedback about voluntary assisted dying contact the Review Board Secretariat at:

Email: Health.VADReviewBoard@sa.gov.au

Phone: [\(08\) 8226 8859](tel:0882268859)

For more information

**Health Services Programs Branch
Department for Health and Wellbeing**

Health.VoluntaryAssistedDying@sa.gov.au

www.sahealth.sa.gov.au/vad

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