

2 December 2024

Assisted dying Bill for England and Wales passes first vote

On Friday 29th November [The Terminally Ill Adults \(End of Life\) Bill](#) passed its first vote in the House of Commons with 330 MPs voting in favour and 275 against. This vote was on the general principles of the Bill. The Bill will now go to Committee Stage sometime in early January 2025 where MPs will take oral and written evidence and table amendments.

Any change in the law would not be agreed until next year at the earliest and will most likely take up to two years. During this process the Bill will face extensive scrutiny and further votes in both the Commons and the Lords. More detail on the process can be found through various explainers such as this one from the [Institute for Government](#).

Throughout this process Hospice UK will be reaching out to our members to ensure their voices are heard. We have organised a series of workshops with hospice staff in December to hear their thoughts and reflections on the Bill's text and to inform our communications and recommendations to the Bill Committee.

The debate in the House of Commons

Around 87 MPs spoke in what was an impassioned debate with often emotional speeches for and against a change in legislation. Many, on all sides of the debate, mentioned palliative and end of life care and the hospice sector, recognising the invaluable work they do and key role they play caring for people.

Key issues discussed relevant to hospices include:

Funding and provision of care

- Members on both sides of the debate highlighted the need for better funding of the hospice sector and of palliative and end of life care, however, they had varied ideas about how to achieve this
- MPs were split on whether the introduction of assisted dying would mean that funding and focus would be diverted away from palliative and end of life care, or whether it would further the discussion on how we fund these services
- Some raised the need for a cross-party funding consensus and agreement. For example, Chair of the Health and Social Care Committee, Layla Moran said there hadn't been any firm commitments from Government on how we fix palliative care and called on the Secretary of State to address this
- Several MPs, including Diane Abbott, shared support for a Commission to look more in depth at palliative care

Access to, and limits of, palliative and end of life care

- The limits of palliative care were also discussed, with MPs highlighting that there are some symptoms that cannot be relieved by even the best care
- Some Members, who did not support the Bill, argued that if we get palliative care provision right, we can do more for people at the end of their life
- Others described the geographic variation in access to care, and expressed concerns that many will not have a real choice between assisted dying and palliative and end of life care if they cannot access proper care in their area. For many, this also centred on health inequities and how marginalised groups may be at increased risk

Workforce and safeguards

- Members on both sides of the debate put forward arguments on whether the NHS and the Judicial system have the capacity to introduce the measures in the Bill and what the potential consequences of this would be on the wider health system
- Some expressed concerns over the position of palliative care doctors and professionals, and how the sector will feel about implementing the proposed legislation
- Many argued that there are currently no, or very few, safeguards in place for when people decide to decline treatment, or withdraw food and water
- MPs indicated that they wish to use the next stage of the Bill to scrutinise the proposed safeguards and make significant changes

Other issues raised

- Many Members made assertions that death, and the funding of palliative care, is not discussed enough, and credited the debate with bringing this issue forward
- However, concerns were expressed about the wider societal impacts of a decision to legalise assisted dying, alongside specific questions on measures within the Bill, including:
 - What is meant by a 'medical practitioner'
 - How will the judicial element function
 - The provision for a proxy to sign documents on behalf of an individual
 - How possible is it to determine a prognosis of 6 months

Concluding remarks from Kim Leadbeater MP

- "We take the Bill to the next stage now, we continue the process and it will be a very thorough process but we also have to champion all the issues that have been talked about today, whether that is palliative care, whether that is the rights of disabled people, the NHS. All those things are important."