

Briefing on Committee Stage of the Terminally Ill Adults (End of Life) Bill and our next steps - March 2025

The Terminally Ill Adults (End of Life) Bill completed Committee Stage on Tuesday 25th March 2025. Committee Stage involved a group of MPs, including Health Minister Stephen Kinnock, examining the Bill in detail and considering amendments.

We've been actively engaged in Committee Stage through submitting written evidence to the Bill Committee, providing verbal evidence to highlight member concerns as well as meeting with multiple Committee members. Given our long-established position of "no collective view", we have been pleased that Hospice UK's written and verbal evidence has been recalled by Committee members across the spectrum of views on the Bill.

What changes were made to the Bill at Committee Stage?

A number of changes have been made to the Bill, including a number of amendments relevant to what we've been raising with MPs:

Enhanced professional input - Assessing doctors should now seek input from other health or social care professionals who have recently provided care to the individual.

Requirement for specialist consultation - An assessing doctor must consider whether they should seek specialist consultation and if so, they must share records of such consultations with other assessing doctors.

Mandatory Codes of Practice - The Secretary of State will now be required to issue Codes of Practice on how the Bill will operate in practice whereas it was previously optional. Note that there is an ongoing effort to ensure part of this requirement includes issuing a specific Code of Practice on how any assisted dying service interacts with hospices, and what protections are available for hospices in determining their level of involvement.

Assessment panel - High Court involvement has been replaced with a three-person panel to give final approval to applications. This panel will include a senior lawyer, a psychiatrist, and a social worker, with the finer details to be worked out at implementation stage.

These changes take some steps towards reflecting our call for a more holistic approach to assessment which we advocated for in our evidence submissions.

Challenges that remain

Despite some welcome amendments, we remain concerned about a number of unanswered questions and unresolved issues. The Bill still lacks provisions that acknowledge the existing strains on the delivery of hospice care services, including financial and workforce challenges, and how a fragile but essential sector may be impacted by the precise nature and level of interaction between assisted dying and existing hospice services. Continuing to leave these issues unaddressed makes it difficult to understand potential obligations that may conflict with the articles, views, ethos and capacities of individual hospices.

In particular, we would like to see more recognition of the importance of giving Boards of hospices space and agency to determine for themselves the precise level and speed of involvement, based on their articles, their assessment of best interest for their beneficiaries and their charity, and their duty of care to their staff and volunteers.

There are difficult and complex considerations about what should or should not be included on the face of the Bill itself, and what we can work constructively with government to develop in the implementation period.

We would be reassured by a requirement for the government to issue a specific Code of Practice that considers the potential impact of an assisted dying service on hospices, and the protections available for hospices in determining their involvement.

Next steps and our ongoing advocacy

The Bill now moves to Report Stage on Friday 25th April where MPs will have another opportunity to debate and amend the Bill. We'll be continuing to work with MPs to press for recognition of the pressures hospices are facing and the need for clear protections.

As an immediate next step, we will be writing privately to the Bill's sponsor, Kim Leadbeater, to highlight these concerns and make the case for further amendments. A copy of this letter will also be sent to Minister Stephen Kinnock.

As with our funding campaign, there is an important balance to strike between speaking out in public and working privately with MPs, and in particular with government, on the Bill as it progresses. We are keeping this approach under continual review.

Please rest assured we continue to work tirelessly to secure the changes to the Bill that ensure the interests of hospices are protected, and to accurately portray the hospice sector and workforce as one that encompasses the full range of views on this complex and emotive issue.

We will continue to keep you informed as the Bill progresses.

If you have any questions or would like further information about our engagement with the Bill, please email policy@hospiceuk.org.