

## **Meeting your MP about assisted dying - talking points (May 2022)**

In this guide we are calling on you to take your support to the next level by meeting your MP. This is based on the wisdom of many of our supporters who've met with MPs both in-person and on Zoom. Here we'll cover the practicalities of speaking to your MP as well as what to say. Hopefully we'll inspire you to step it up during this critical time for the campaign.

### **Take your support to the next level and meet your MP**

Over the past few years, hundreds of Dignity in Dying supporters have met with your MPs and, as a result, many have shifted their stance to supporting law change. This progress is simply staggering and we couldn't have done it without the determination and hard work of our supporters.

We have had some pivotal campaign moments over the last year and the momentum is with us. But we need to keep it going. We need you to step it up a notch and change the minds of even more MPs, so that we have a solid majority of support in Parliament and a commitment for time on the agenda to have a proper debate.

We've reached a critical point where the views of a group of MPs - who are neither for nor against a change in the law - hang in the balance. Every meeting with one of these MPs in particular, will help us get to a solid majority of support sooner.

This means if your MP is open-minded to a change in the law, or recognises the current law isn't working well, we need to redouble our efforts to turn them into a supporter (if you're unsure of your MP's views do please ask us). We also need to shore up our support; so if your MP is showing some signs of support but isn't quite there yet, we need to firm up their support and tip them fully over to our side. If they're already supportive, you can ask them to take action to ensure assisted dying is on the agenda.

We know that face to face meetings have a huge impact on MPs' minds. While it's important to update MPs on the facts and figures of the campaign (which we do regularly) it's hearing the real experiences of their constituents that is most likely to influence their views. One meeting alone might not change their minds on the spot (although it often does), but several meetings over a period of time often will. Every meeting with an MP is vital at this stage.

And remember, it's your MPs job to listen to you (regardless of whether you voted for them).

### **What is it like to meet your MP?**

Every meeting and MP is different, but based on hundreds of successful meetings over the last few years, we now have a good idea of what works well. Here are some ideas of what you can say at yours:

- **Your experience:** If you've had personal experience of the current law not working, for example if you are living with a terminal illness, or someone close to you wanted the choice of an assisted death, be human and tell that story. Let

them understand the practical and emotional hurdles and difficulties you face. This is the most important thing to focus on in your meeting or conversation.

- **Our position:** Be clear that assisted dying refers to a terminally ill, mentally competent adult, requesting life ending medication from a doctor in their final months, subject to strong safeguards.
- **The current law on assisted dying is cruel, unfair and unsafe:** Terminally ill people who want to control their deaths have no option but to either travel abroad, take their own life or risk enduring unnecessary suffering as they die:
  - **New data from the Office for National Statistics (ONS) shows that significant numbers of dying people are taking matters into their own hands** in this country. People with severe and potentially terminal health conditions are more than twice as likely to take their own lives than the general population. Possibly as many as 1 in 10 in England and Wales are by people with a life-limiting illness (see Dignity in Dying's report *Last Resort*).
  - One Britain a week travels abroad for an assisted death in Switzerland (see Dignity in Dying's report *The True Cost: How the UK outsources death to Dignitas*). Yet many can't afford to go abroad (with the cost upwards of £10k), are too ill to travel or don't want to risk implicating loved ones in a criminal act. And those who do travel often go too early, worried that waiting any longer would mean it is too late.
  - A small but substantial number of dying people are suffering as they die even with good palliative care. The Office of Health Economics research found that 17 people a day will suffer as they die, even with the very best care. For more information, see Dignity in Dying's report, *The Inescapable Truth*.
- **The UK is being left behind other countries:** Other countries similar to our own are developing safeguarded, fair and compassionate laws. Assisted dying as a choice for terminally ill, mentally competent adults is legal in 10 American states plus the District of Columbia, almost all of Australia and across New Zealand. In Europe Spain has adopted an assisted dying law, Ireland have put assisted dying to a special committee, Jersey overwhelmingly approved an assisted dying and legislation is being considered in multiple other countries.
- **Scotland will lead the way with a clear path to changing the law.** Liam McArthur's private members' bill has completed a record-breaking consultation, with the report due after summer and the bill due for debate before Holyrood in 2023.

- **The petition on the Government website has reached over 100,000 signatures and will trigger a debate in Parliament.** This shows how popular and important assisted dying is to constituents across the country. You can find your constituency on the map and tell your MP how many local people have signed it.
- **Does your MP support the idea of giving time on the agenda for a free and fair debate?** Dignity in Dying are calling on the government and opposition parties to grant enough time for assisted dying to be properly debated and scrutinised in Parliament. Ask your MP if we can count on their support.

### **Questions you can ask them:**

Do you agree the current law isn't working?

Would you vote for an assisted dying law were it to be debated tomorrow? If not, what would help change your mind?

Would you support giving time on the agenda for a free and fair debate?

Tips:

- You don't need to be an expert
- You don't need to cover everything - stick to a few key points
- It's a journey: you don't need to convince them on the spot
- If they agree the current law isn't safe that's an important step
- See your role as educating and informing your MP
- Try to build a positive relationship with your MP

### **How to go about organising a meeting**

Usually, all MPs host regular surgeries in the local area (traditionally on Fridays), where you can make an appointment. MPs are offering surgery meetings in-person and/or virtually, on a video call, such as Zoom or Skype or telephone meetings.

You will get approximately 20 minutes for your slot, but it could be more or less (whether in-person, online or on the phone). You can contact your MP by email, phone or by letter to request to meet them.

All MPs contact details can be found on the Parliament website:

<https://members.parliament.uk/members/Commons>

You will probably be in touch with one of their members of staff, so it's worth keeping them on your side. Let them know you are getting in touch to request a meeting (virtual or

otherwise) to discuss the law on assisted dying, briefly outlining any personal experience you have and including your address so that they know you live in the constituency. You don't need to go into a lot of detail, as you'll have plenty of opportunity to do that when you meet or speak.

Don't be afraid to chase your MP about your appointment, in fact you probably will need to do this if you don't hear back after 10 days. Give their office number a ring or send them a polite reminder email. Some supporters have had to chase their MPs more than once - don't give up.

Many thanks for taking the step to meet your MP and best of luck with your meeting.

If you have any questions about meeting your MP, or would like more support, please email [francesca.hall@dignityindying.org.uk](mailto:francesca.hall@dignityindying.org.uk)