

## **Assisted Suicide (Scotland) Bill**

### **British Association for Counselling and Psychotherapy (BACP)**

The British Association for Counselling and Psychotherapy (BACP) would like to submit the following response to the Health and Sport Committee's call for evidence around the Assisted Suicide (Scotland) Bill.

#### **1. The British Association for Counselling and Psychotherapy (BACP)**

BACP is the leading and largest body for counselling and psychotherapy in Scotland with over 1,700 practitioner members and over 40,000 UK-wide, making it the largest counselling body in Europe. Our members are drawn from the various professional disciplines in the field of counselling and psychotherapy and based in a range of settings. All BACP members are bound by the Ethical Framework for Good Practice for Counselling and Psychotherapy and within this, the Professional Conduct Procedure.

#### **2. Submission**

From the outset of this response, BACP would like to make it clear that the organisation does not take a position on whether there should be a legal right to assisted suicide and our comments are not intended as support for any such legislation. However, we are suggesting that independent counselling should be included in a Bill of this nature, for the reasons given below:

##### **Decision making and mental health assessments:**

- BACP believes that those considering assisted dying should have access to independent, person-centred counselling, which provides a dedicated space for people to explore their reasons and motivations.
- Such counselling should be provided by a professionally-qualified counsellor who is accountable for their practice to a professional body and an ethical framework, and must not be a family member, must not be assessing the individual psychiatrically, and must have no vested interest in the individual's decision.
- We believe that access to an independent counsellor (one who is a member of a professional body with an ethical framework such as BACP) as part of the mental health assessment process and the patient's decision making process, could provide specialist support to the patient (and their families), and could reduce fears of coercion – whilst continuing to leave the ultimate decision with patients and doctors.
- By offering independent counselling, BACP believes that the public would be reassured and that individuals and their families would be supported.

**Cost of counselling:**

- BACP believes the most practical and cost-effective way of including independent counselling within the assisted dying process is within local general practice itself, where counsellors are often already in place.
- The Bill should propose that primary-care counsellors be provided with top-up training on assisted dying to ensure they have the right skills to deliver this specialist care and support. Training costs would be reasonable and would ensure a Government-approved quality standard for the counselling that patients receive. In addition, by being based in the GP practice, access would be easy.

**Support for families:**

- BACP believes that counselling support should also be available to the family members of those who have opted for an assisted death, as while they may have supported the person's decision, they may later experience complicated and difficult feelings.

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**3. Further information**

Should the Committee be seeking further written or oral evidence, BACP would be delighted to provide additional information about counselling and assisted suicide.

**British Association for Counselling and Psychotherapy**