



Assisted suicide opens door to abuse – report

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Deaths by assisted suicide have increased wherever the practices have been legalised, opening the door to abuse, a report claims.

The report has set off alarm bells for Bob McCoskrie from Family First who says it sends a dangerous message to young New Zealanders about suicide.

But MP Maryan Street, who has withdrawn her euthanasia bill until after next year's election, says people need to have the choice as to when they end their lives and she says the report is misleading and statistically wrong.

The report by the Institute of Marriage and Family Canada says legal euthanasia is never just for "exceptional" cases" and eligibility rules are highly subjective. It says laws legalising euthanasia/assisted suicide ignore the risks to those who are vulnerable and/or susceptible to coercion as long as they self-define their suffering as unbearable.

There are no second chances once euthanasia is perceived as the best treatment, the report concludes.

Mr McCoskrie told Breakfast this morning that to allow Maryan Street's bill would "open up a Pandora's Box for elder abuse".

New Zealand should adopt the same precautionary approach to assisted suicide as it did to the death penalty which said one life lost is one too many, Mr McCoskrie said.

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"Rather than increase killing, let's increase palliative care and pain management and fund hospices the way they should be funded."

Mr McCoskrie says Hospice New Zealand and the NZ Medical Association "don't want a bar of this legislation" because they know the coercive power and abuse that could happen under it.

"We should be increasing care, not increasing killing.

"To legalise assisted suicide would place large numbers of vulnerable people at risk - in particular those who are depressed, elderly, sick, disabled, those experiencing chronic illness, limited access to good medical care, and those who feel themselves to be under emotional or financial pressure to request early death."

The report says euthanasia deaths have increased 64% between 2005 and 2010 in the Netherlands, by 130% between 2009 and 2012 in Washington and have doubled in Oregon since 2005.

It says in the Netherlands, euthanasia began with terminally ill patients and expanded to those with mental illness but now babies with spina bifida or other illnesses are "killed with parental consent". And it claims patients with Alzheimer's disease, even though they can no longer choose to be killed, are being euthanised.

"The bill put forward by Labour MP Maryan Street would represent the most wide-ranging law of its kind in the world - and would be ripe for abuse," Mr McCoskrie says.

Ms Street disputes the figures in the report but says undoubtedly there are people who would not have thought about using legalised euthanasia before because it was not a legal option for them.

She told Breakfast she has looked at legislation from all around the world and tried to find the best bits. She says the bill contains caveats and protection to prevent coercion.