

DMD-Catalunya's proposal for an official declaration by European cities in support of the right to dignity in dying

Preamble

The Universal Declaration of Human Rights (1948) states, in its first article, that: “All human beings are born free and equal in dignity and rights”. This universal freedom, equality and right to dignity must not be lost at any stage in life or in the final approach to death.

The first article of the 2000 Charter of Fundamental rights of the European Union states: “Human Dignity is inviolable. It must be respected and protected”. Article 3 states: “1. Everyone has the right to respect for his or her physical and mental integrity. 2. In the fields of medicine and biology, the following must be respected in particular: - the free and informed consent of the person concerned”. Article 4 says: “No one shall be subjected to torture or to inhuman or degrading treatment or punishment”. Article 6: “Everyone has the right to liberty and security of person”. And article 10.1: “Everyone has the right to freedom of thought, conscience and religion”. Article 25 states: “The Union recognises and respects the rights of the elderly to lead a life of dignity and independence and to participate in social and cultural life”.

We again affirm that the dignity and freedom of European citizens, the rights spelled out in these articles, must not be sacrificed in the final approach to death.

Despite the clear recognition of these rights, European organisations for dignity in dying can affirm, based on what we hear from citizens experiencing problems in managing an approach to death with dignity, that **too many citizens of the European union are still suffering unnecessarily in their final days due to:**

- Lack of knowledge on the part of a significant number of medical staff about patients' rights in their final days.
- Lack of public awareness in Europe about our rights at the end of our lives and how to exercise those rights.
- Difficulties in accessing palliative care for many European citizens.
- The illegality in many EU countries of assisted dying.

In order to broaden the right to dignity in death, we need **national legal changes and practical measures to ensure that our existing rights can be met in accord with individuals' wishes and their understanding of human dignity.**

Progress in the right to dignity in dying also involves:

- Improving training, both pre-qualification and in-service, for medical & nursing staff, social workers and mental health professionals. Building awareness that the end of life forms part of their duty of care and improving professionals' knowledge of, and respect for, people's rights to dignity in dying.
- Publicising Living Wills (*Advance Decision* in England and Wales), improving the mechanisms for ensuring that relevant staff are aware of patients' living wills, and working to end the taboo around speaking about one's own death.

Local councils are the public bodies closest to citizens and can thus play an important role in building awareness of people's rights to dignity in dying, and in particular the possibility of having a living will (*Advance Decision*). On the basis that the right to dignity in dying is a human right, and that councils must defend these rights, councils can work to improve the mechanisms for ensuring that relevant staff are aware of patients' living will (*Advance Decision*).

Right to Die Europe and European associations for Dignity in Dying, supported by the MEPs below, ask European councils to adopt a series of measures to permit their

citizens to have as much dignity as possible in their final days. We therefore propose this official declaration.

Official Declaration

_____ Council supports the proposals of Right to Die Europe and _____.

As part of our support for these proposals we will encourage the defense of the right to dignity in dying by:

- 1.- Training council staff (social services, care staff etc) in people's rights for dignity in dying and about Living Wills (*Advance Decision*).
- 2.- Educational and promotional activities in council-run services, informing the public about Living Wills (*Advance Decision*)
- 3.- Giving administrative support to the drawing up of Living Wills, allowing people to sign them before a local official and/or changing local rules to make this possible.
- 4.- Improving palliative home care and increase the expansion of council-run palliative home care services.
- 5.- Supporting moves to de-criminalise and legalise assisted dying in European parliaments where it is still illegal. Only with legalisation will people be free to choose a clinical method to exercise their right to dignity in dying and will we end the suffering involved in individual clandestine solutions or having to travel abroad.

*MEPs:

Josep-Maria Terricabras (Greens/EFA) - proposer

The declaration will be available to all MEPs for signature.

The following European organisations for dignity in dying back this declaration:

