

Voluntary Assisted Dying in South Australia

Quarterly Report | 1 January to 31 March 2024

Message from the Presiding Member of the Voluntary Assisted Dying Review Board

On behalf of the Voluntary Assisted Dying Review Board, I am pleased to present the 5th quarterly report on voluntary assisted dying activity in South Australia covering the period 1 January to 31 March 2024.

The Review Board have had a productive start to the second year of voluntary assisted dying in South Australia which with the one year anniversary of voluntary assisted dying in South Australia on 31 January 2024.

On 14 April 2024, we had the honour of hosting the first Voluntary Assisted Dying Day of Reflection. The atmosphere in the SPF Hall at the Repat Health Precinct was peaceful and the live music, flowers and candles created a beautiful space for connection and reflection for over 100 guests.

After a Welcome to Country by Uncle Frank Wanganeen, we were grateful to have the Minister for Health and Wellbeing present to give the opening address. This was followed by a series of reflections from family members, a VAD medical practitioner and a Care Navigator and the President of VADSA. The opportunity to hear from and spend time with family, friends and clinicians who have supported people through the voluntary assisted dying pathway was a highlight as were the beautiful grounds of the Repat Health Precinct.

We have also commenced work to consider how as a Board we might support research into voluntary assisted dying in South Australian and nationally. As VAD is such a new area, research will be important to help us to progress our understanding of and approach to voluntary assisted dying in the future. I am looking forward to watching this work progress and to keeping the community up to date.

Voluntary assisted dying operates every day within a tight legal framework supported by excellent clinical and operational governance structures. On the ground though it is human beings supporting one another to navigate the painful, challenging and sometimes frightening realities of suffering and of life and death with care and compassion. It is a privilege to know and work with those doctors, clinicians and staff who support access to voluntary assisted dying every day.



ASSOCIATE PROFESSOR MELANIE TURNER

Presiding Member

On behalf of the Voluntary Assisted Dying Review Board

Feedback from patients, families, and the community

Participating Medical practitioners, Pharmacists, Care Navigators, Voluntary Assisted Dying Liaison Officers and volunteers continue to provide essential support to patients and families every day, ensuring that people have access to all the information and support they need to make informed decisions about their end of life care. Feedback received from patients, families and medical practitioners continues to demonstrate the quality of service provision and support being provided and is useful to inform service improvements:

'Our fears and concerns were totally taken away by our first meeting with our Care Navigator. So respectful, so gentle, caring and compassionate. Every contact we had with this service was of the highest quality, compassionate, considered, thoughtful, entirely cognisant of the legal requirements.'

Personal reflection from a family member

Today I was asked to perform a home visit to certify life extinct. She took her VAD medication at 930 am, was asleep in five minutes and stopped breathing 2 hours and 25 minutes later. She was supported by her husband, three sons and 2 daughters in laws and a friend.

The event was without complication. Her family described it as "peaceful" and "beautiful"

The family wished me to extend their heartfelt thanks to the entire VAD team for enabling her access to VAD and for the compassionate care they received.

Email from a Medical Practitioner

News and updates on voluntary assisted dying

Voluntary Assisted Dying Day of Reflection 2024

The Voluntary Assisted Dying Review Board hosted the first Voluntary Assisted Dying Day of Reflection on 14 April 2024. The event was held at the SPF Hall in the beautiful grounds of the Repat Health Precinct and was attended by over 100 guests. On arrival, guests were provided with the opportunity to gather and connect, to light a floating candle in remembrance and to write in a Book of Reflection.

The Day of Reflection is considered an important component of bereavement support and provides a chance for bereaved people to look back and where ready, to look forward, and to engage with others in the community who have experienced voluntary assisted dying firsthand.

The Minister for Health and Wellbeing opened the event after a Welcome to Country by Uncle Frank Wanganeen. Guests at the event included:

- Over 60 Family friends and loved ones of those who died on the VAD pathway in 2023
- Medical Practitioners, SA Health clinicians and staff involved in supporting those people to access the VAD pathway
- Members of the VAD Review Board
- VADSA volunteers and others

It is anticipated that this event will be held annually and future events such as this will be informed by feedback from attendees.

Voluntary Assisted Dying Research

One of the roles of the Voluntary Assisted Dying Review Board as outlined in the Voluntary Assisted Dying Act, is to conduct research on the information and forms submitted that are to the Board which includes a range of quantitative and qualitative information.

At the Board meeting on 9 February 2024, the Review Board agreed to commence work on the development of a Research Framework to define how research regarding VAD in South Australia should occur. The Research Framework will outline how those involved in VAD can engage with, participate in, shape and support research in relation to voluntary assisted dying. The framework will also outline how research activities will be undertaken with appropriate governance and in alignment with evidence based research principles and priorities.

To support the Board to carry out this role, the Board will also establish a Research Subcommittee. The subcommittee will include representatives from the Board in addition to representatives from other relevant organisations and disciplines, both clinical and academic.

Completing a Doctors Certificate of Cause of Death for a person subject to a VAD permit

It has been just over a year since the Births, Deaths, and Marriages (BDM) Registration Office in South Australia introduced a new doctor's certificate of cause of death. Notification about this new form was sent to doctors, clinics and hospitals in January 2023 and copies of the new forms were provided to ensure they are used for all deaths in South Australia.

The doctor's certificate of cause of death can be completed for a person who was subject to a voluntary assisted dying permit even if the doctor certifying the death was not involved in supporting the person to access voluntary assisted dying. The certifying doctor must ensure they are eligible to certify the form by ensuring they were the doctor responsible for the deceased's medical care immediately before death or they examined the body of the deceased within 48 hours after death.

Part 4 Manner of Death

Part 4 of the updated Doctors Certificate of Cause of Death form captures information regarding Voluntary Assisted Dying. Completing Part 4 of the Doctors Certificate of Cause of Death form does not require any specific training in relation to voluntary assisted dying and should be completed to the best of the certifying doctor's knowledge.

Part 3 Cause of Death

The cause of death recorded on the Doctors Certificate of Cause of Death is recorded separately and is recorded as the underlying disease, illness or medical condition that caused the persons death. The cause of death is what is recorded by the Registrar on a person's Death Certificate which does not mention voluntary assisted dying.

Doctors can obtain a PDF version of the Doctors Certificate of Cause of Death by emailing registrations.bdm@agd.sa.gov.au.

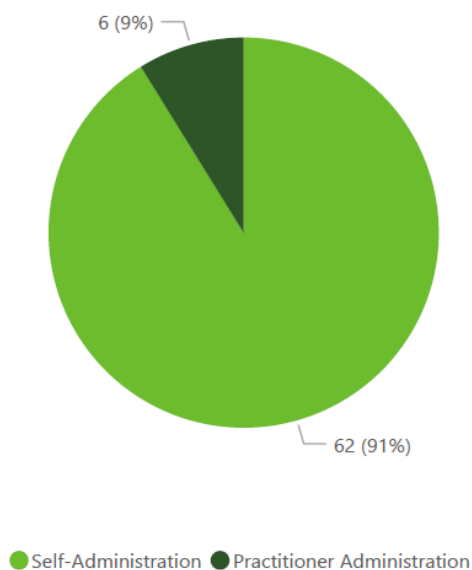
Voluntary assisted dying permits issued 1 January – 31 March 2024

Between 1 January and 31 March 2024:

- A total of 67 people were issued with a voluntary assisted dying permit.
- Of these, 62 permits were for self-administration of the voluntary assisted dying substance and 6 were for practitioner administration of the substance.
- On average 24 days elapsed between a person making a first request to access voluntary assisted dying and receiving an outcome regarding an application for a voluntary assisted dying permit.
- 100% of permit applications to the Chief Executive, DHW had a decision made within 3 business days as prescribed under Section 16 of the Voluntary Assisted Dying Regulations 2022.

Permits issued

Permits issued by type



People who have had a permit issued

67

Average calendar days between first request and permit decision

24.21

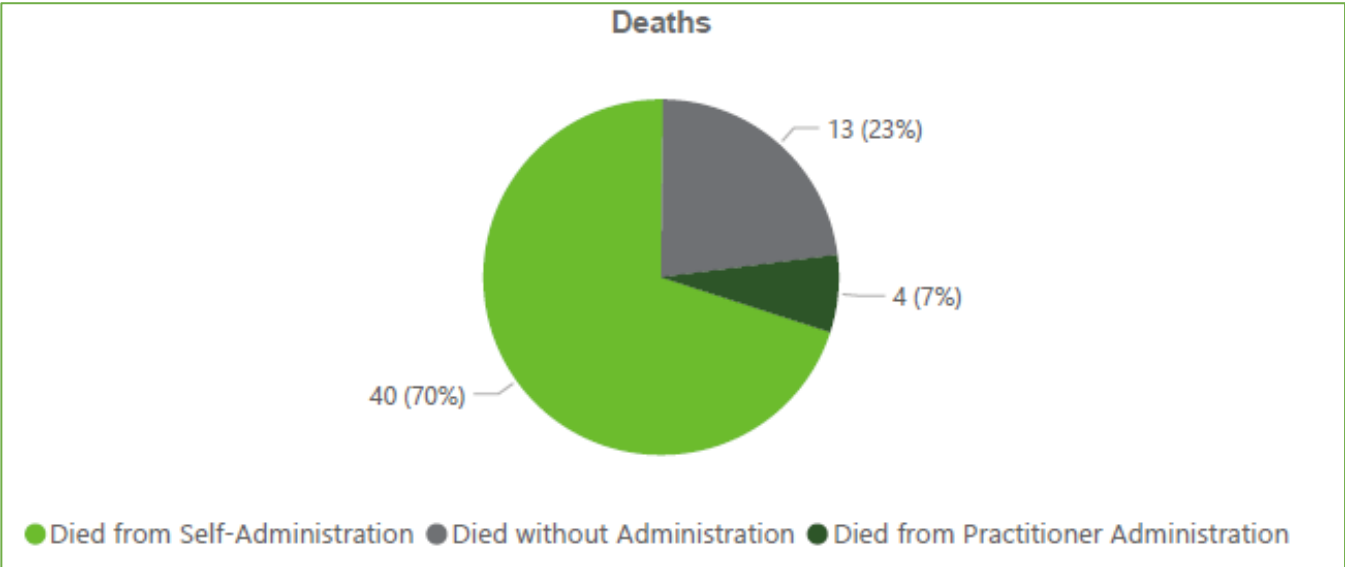
Percentage of permits issued within the prescribed period (3 business days)

100%

Deaths

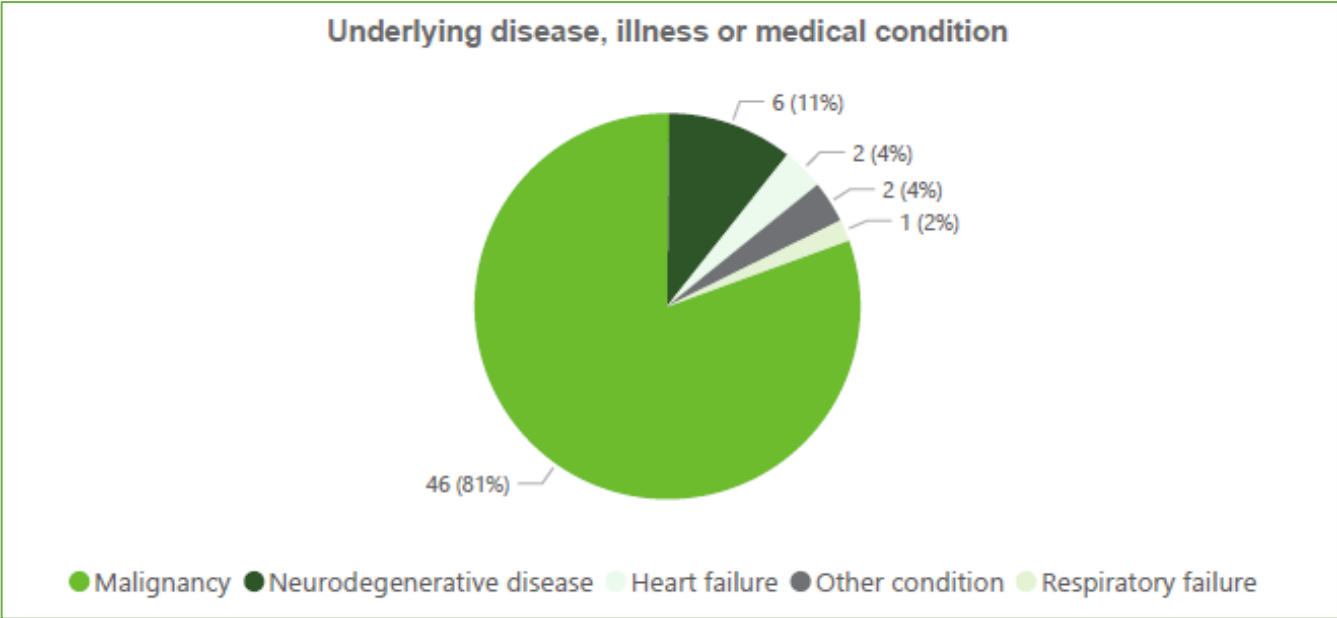
Between 1 January and 31 March 2024, a total of 57 people who were the subject of a voluntary assisted dying permit died. Of these:

- 40 (70%) people died as a result of self-administration of the voluntary assisted dying substance
- 4 (7%) people died as a result of practitioner administration of the voluntary assisted dying substance
- 13 (23%) people died without administration of the substance



Of the 57 people who died who were the subject of a voluntary assisted dying permit between 1 January and 31 March 2024:

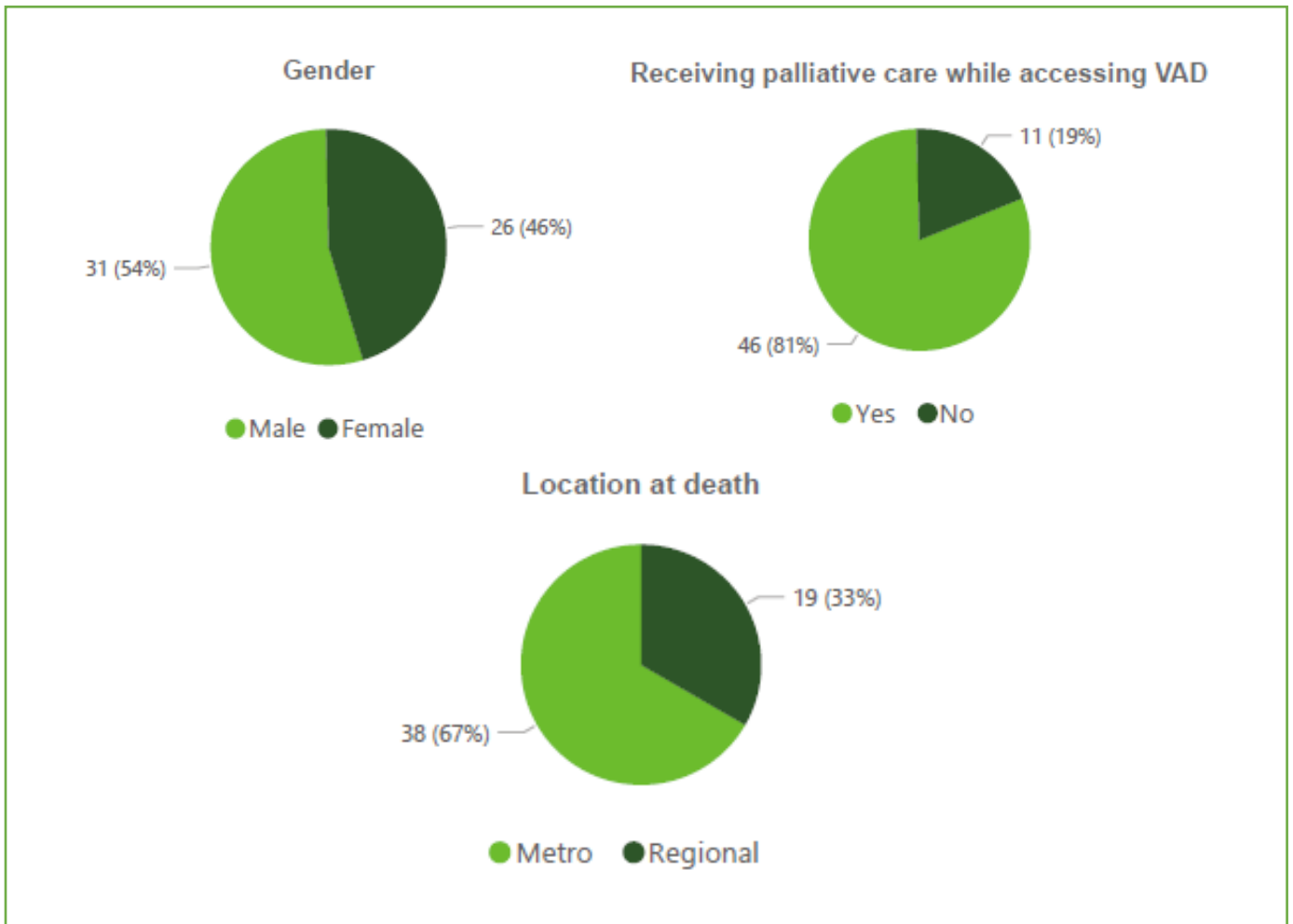
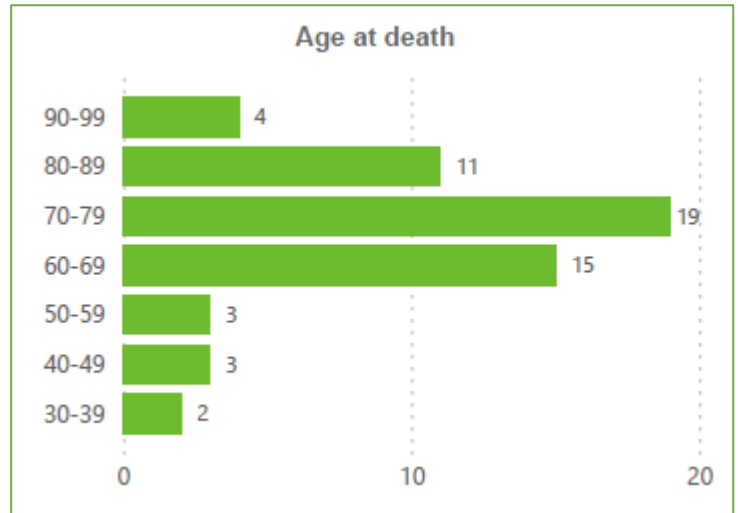
- 46 (81%) people had cancer as the disease, illness, or medical condition for which they were eligible for voluntary assisted dying.
- 6 (11%) people had a neurodegenerative disease, as the disease illness or medical condition for which they were eligible for voluntary assisted dying.

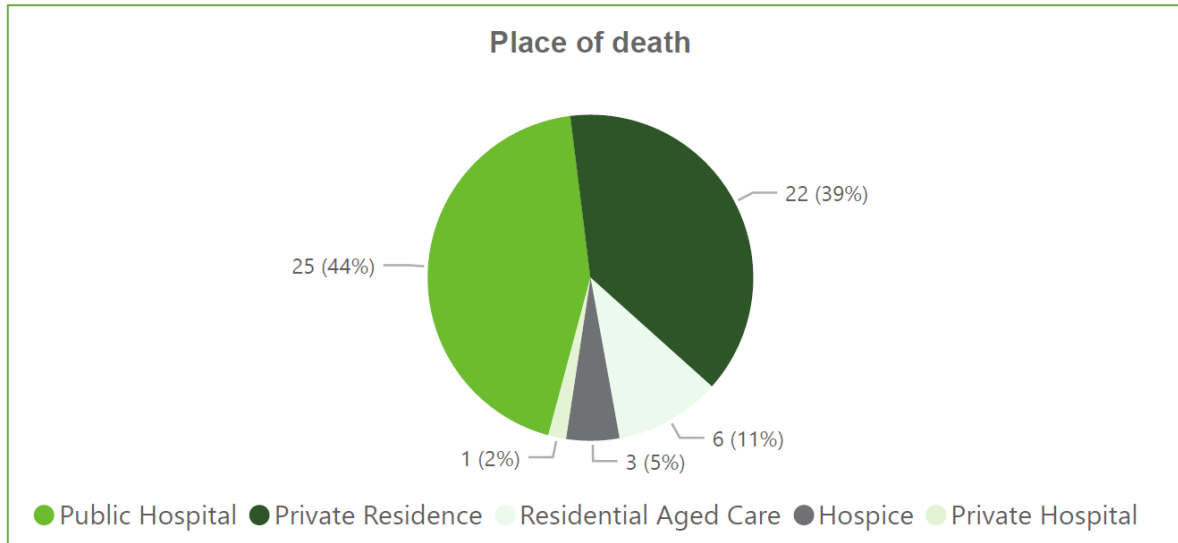


Demographics

Of the 57 people who died who were the subject of a voluntary assisted dying permit between 1 January and 31 March 2024:

- 49 (86%) were aged 60 years or older at the time of their death.
- 26 (46%) were female and 31(54%) were male.
- 38 (67%) lived in metropolitan Adelaide and 19 (33%) lived in regional South Australia.
- 46 (81%) were receiving palliative care while accessing voluntary assisted dying.
- 22 (39%) died in private residence, 25 (44%) died in a public hospital, 6 died in a residential aged care facility and 3 died in a hospice or palliative care unit.

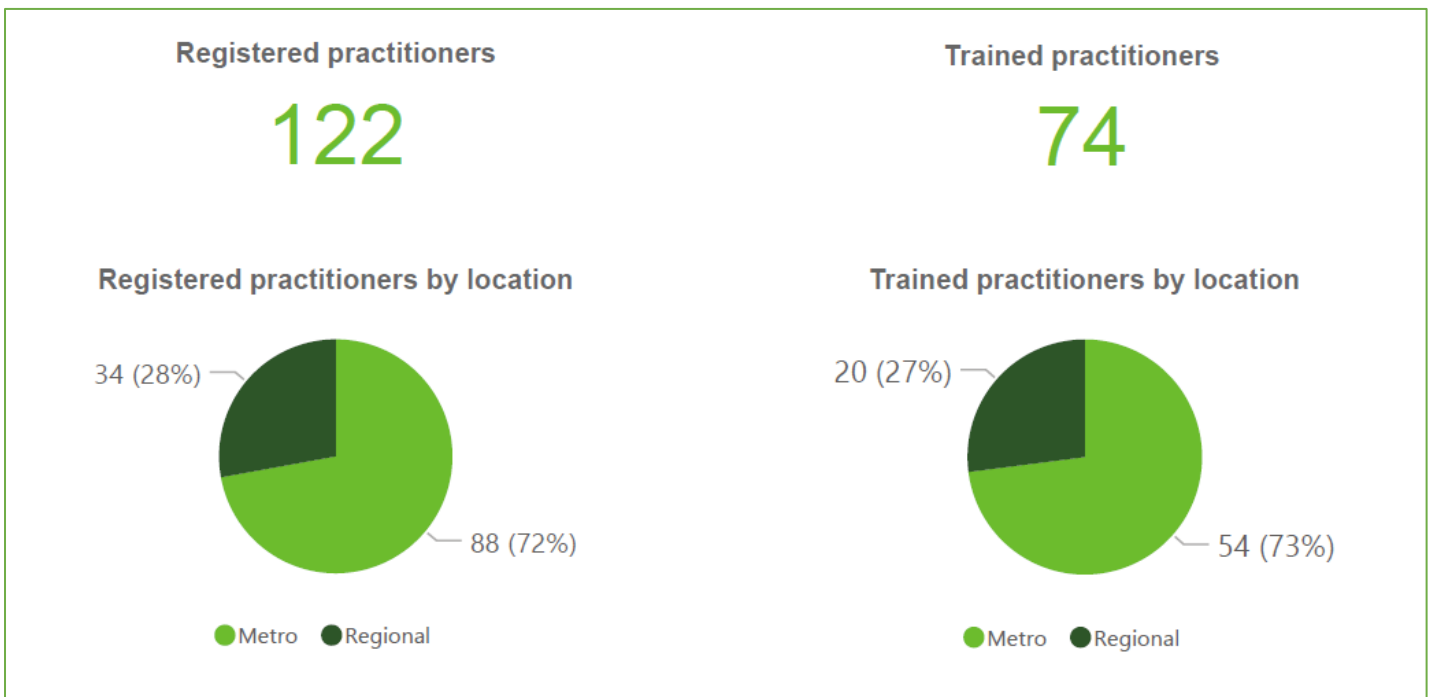




Medical practitioners

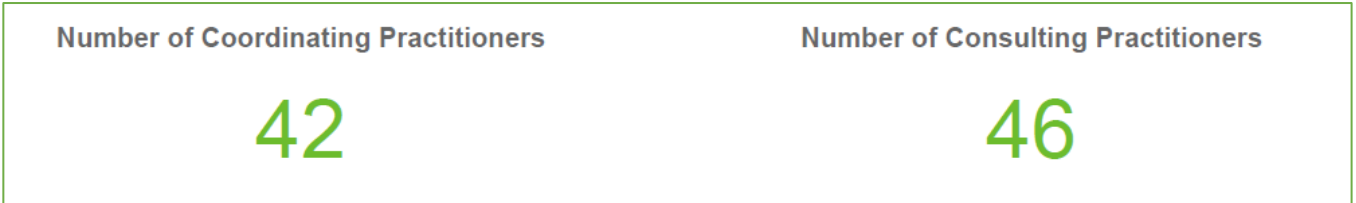
Since the commencement of voluntary assisted dying in South Australia a total of 122 medical practitioners have registered to undertake the mandatory practitioner training to be able to deliver voluntary assisted dying. Of these, 88 (72%) reside in metropolitan Adelaide with the remaining 34 (28%) in regional South Australia.

Of the 122 practitioners who registered to undertake the mandatory training, 74 (61%) have completed the training and are eligible to deliver voluntary assisted dying in South Australia. Of these 54 (73%) reside in metropolitan Adelaide and 20 (27%) reside in regional South Australia. The representation of trained medical practitioners across metropolitan and regional areas closely reflects South Australia's population distribution with approximately 30 percent of people residing in a regional area.



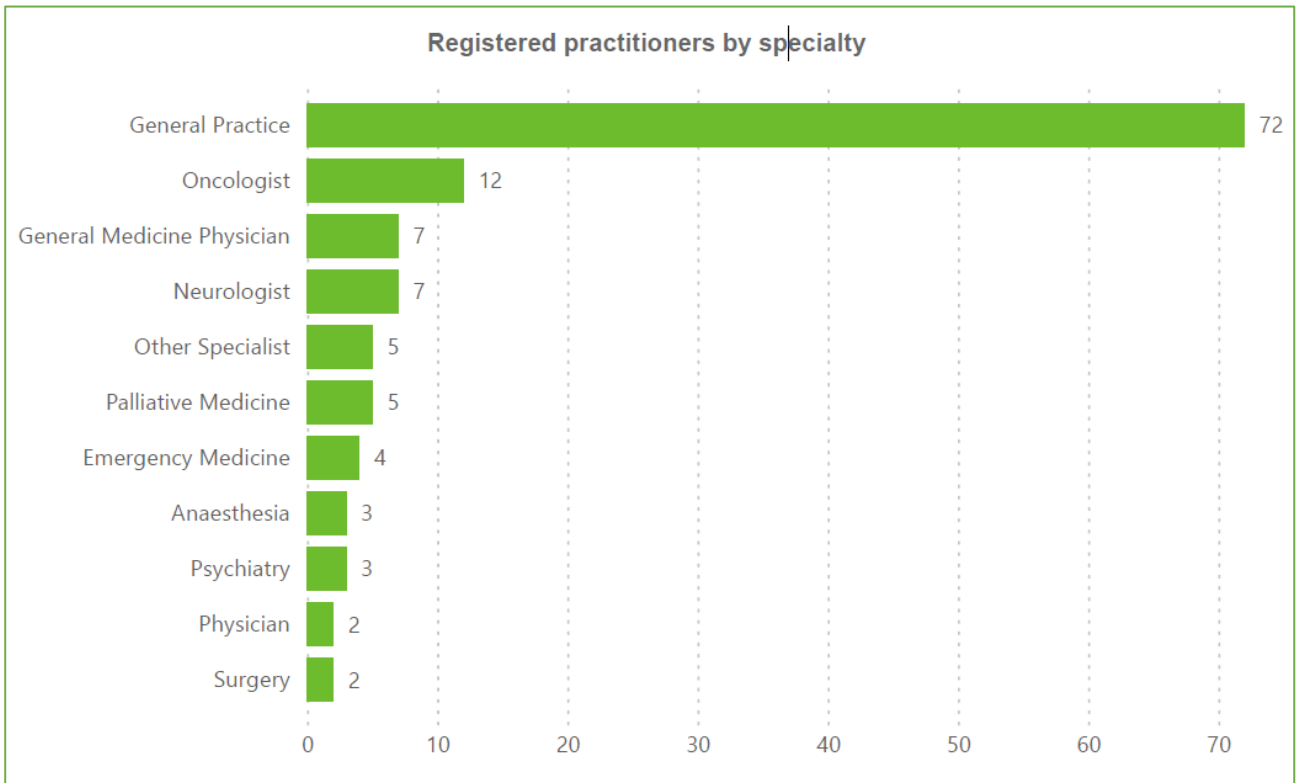
For the period 1 January to 31 March 2024:

- 42 of the 74 trained medical practitioners accepted a first request from a person seeking access to voluntary assisted dying becoming the Coordinating Practitioner for that person.
- 46 of the 74 trained medical practitioners accepted a referral from a Coordinating Practitioner to be a Consulting Practitioner.



Of the 122 medical practitioners who registered to complete the mandatory training to deliver voluntary assisted dying in South Australia, 72 are General Practitioners with the remaining 50 from a range of medical specialties including Oncology, General medicine, Neurology, Palliative medicine, Emergency medicine, Anaesthesia and Psychiatry.

The high representation of General Practitioners reflects the important and valued role that GPs play in end of life care planning for patients living with a life limiting illness.



Feedback

If you would like to provide feedback to the Voluntary Assisted Dying Review Board, please email us at: Health.VADReviewBoard@sa.gov.au.



For more information

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Interpreter



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