

For immediate release

End of Life Choice Act is a risk not worth taking says action group.

Two thirds of New Zealanders are unaware there is a referendum on euthanasia at this year's election. Yet the risky and badly constructed End of Life Choice Act will become law with a simple majority on the 17th October.

Getting people to consider what is in the Act and the implications of making it law is the aim of Vote No to the End of Life Act, a group of medical, law and ethics professionals who have recently launched their campaign heading into October's election.

"We are 22 professionals covering a range of disciplines that have come together to oppose this Act," says Peter Thirkell, Chair of Vote No to the End of Life Act. "Put simply, the Act is flawed. It will put vulnerable people at risk and will have too many unintended, negative consequences. We are encouraging New Zealanders to Vote No to stop this badly conceived Act."

The group's campaign focuses on 6 reasons for people to Vote No. Of these, the primary reasons are that the Act is bad law, the focus needs to be on providing compassionate care, and the overwhelming opposition of New Zealand doctors with more than 1,500 signing an open letter to oppose the Act as part of the 'Doctors Say No' campaign, and the New Zealand Medical Association also being opposed. There is also the unprecedented aspect of this being the first time an Act has gone to a binding referendum in New Zealand.

"Whatever your views of death and dying, this Act is poor legislation because it does not fully protect people from a wrongful death," says Peter. "Any New Zealander with a terminal illness of six months or less is at risk of an early death through a wrong diagnosis, a wrong judgement about how long they have to live, and pressure from uncaring or abusive family members. The fact that 98% of palliative care professionals and most doctors are opposed reinforces how risky and flawed the Act is. We've never had a fully drafted Act go to referendum in New Zealand before and few are aware of the implications of this."

The group is encouraging people to visit the website www.riskylaw.nz and follow their social media channels on Facebook and Instagram so they can make an informed decision ahead of the referendum. There are a number of experts in this area that are available to speak at community events and people can request a speaker through the website.

"New Zealanders need to take the time to look at what is exactly in this Act. Only 1 in 5 people know what is in it. There is the very real prospect that most New Zealanders will wake up on the morning after the referendum and not realise what they have voted to become law. There's no going back and we implore New Zealanders to do their research."

ENDS

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