

Guernsey paves the way to legalise assisted dying

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Guernsey is likely to become the first part of the British Isles to create a legal regime for assisted dying.

Under the proposal, a terminally ill resident of the Channel island could ask their doctor for a prescription for pills to end their own life.

Members of the States of Guernsey, the island's parliament, would ask an expert group to look at whether the patient should administer the final act themselves or be able to ask someone to assist them.

The proposal, modelled on laws in Oregon in the US and Victoria in Australia, will be put forward in principle in a private member's bill to be debated by Guernsey's politicians in May.

The island's chief minister, Gavin St Pier, is backing the plan, which has a good chance of being approved. If so, a working party will spend 18 months looking at legal and practical elements of a new island law on assisted dying.

Guernsey is a Crown dependency and makes its own laws, although its residents have British passports and its ultimate court of appeal is a judicial committee of the privy council.

Mr St Pier told *The Times* that it was not a proposal for a clinic similar to Dignitas in Switzerland, to which non-residents could travel to end their lives. "What we are looking at is more the Oregon-style regime where those that

Death on request

Canada Adults with a grievous terminal condition can ask a doctor to give a lethal injection or a drug that the patient can self-administer.

Oregon Terminally ill residents can self-administer a prescribed lethal medication. Similar laws in Montana, California, Colorado and Vermont.

Victoria Will be the first Australian state to legalise assisting terminally ill patients requesting a lethal drug.

Switzerland Helping someone end their life out of "compassion" is legal. Some clinics accept non-residents.

Benelux Law allows doctors to end incurably ill patients' lives if they ask for it, also attracting non-residents.

are terminally ill can go to their doctors and can receive a prescription, provided they have the capacity to make that decision," he said.

If the States of Guernsey does back the decision in principle in May, the expert group will look at legal and professional obstacles, how to define and determine terminal illness and any age limit, as well as whether someone could help the patient. It will also

consider measures to protect the vulnerable and mitigate against abuse.

Helping someone to take their life is a criminal offence under the Suicide Act 1961, punishable by up to 14 years' jail. The House of Commons overwhelmingly rejected a private member's bill to legalise assisted suicide brought by Rob Marris, a former Labour MP, in 2015.

Opinion polls have repeatedly suggested public support for a legal regime for assisted dying for mentally competent adults with a terminal illness.

The law is being challenged by Noel Conway, 68, a retired lecturer from Shrewsbury, who is terminally ill with motor neurone disease. He claims that the Suicide Act breaches his right to a dignified death. The High Court rejected his case but judges granted him leave to appeal and his case is expected to go to the Supreme Court.

Peter Saunders, of the Care Not Killing Alliance, which opposes a change in the law, said: "These proposals are deeply flawed and, as we have seen in the tiny number of countries that have introduced similar laws, are open to abuse and incremental extension."

Sarah Wootton, chief executive of Dignity in Dying, a pressure group, said: "It shouldn't be courageous to take a decision that is popular, compassionate, safe and sensible but the people of Guernsey are bravely taking a step towards legalising assisted dying."