

## Written evidence submitted by Involve Foundation (ADY0413)

This submission is largely in response to the following question posed by the Health and Social Care Committee:

- **What should the Government's role be in relation to the debate [on Assisted Dying]?**

### Who we are

[Involve](#) are the UK's leading public participation charity. We believe that people should be at the heart of decisions that matter. For example, we worked with six select committees to set up and run [Climate Assembly UK](#) to bring the public's view on the climate emergency into the heart of parliament. We are also currently running a public dialogue with the Justice Committee on public priorities in the creation of sentencing policy for England and Wales; this will support the committee's wider inquiry on understanding public perceptions of sentencing. And, we ran the [Jersey Assisted Dying Citizens' Jury](#).

### Summary

We believe the UK Government's role on complex, moral issues such as assisted dying should be to facilitate a structured, balanced national debate on the topic, using processes like the [citizens' jury in Jersey](#), before bringing forward legislation that reflects the jury's recommendations while providing the appropriate safeguards required for equitable and safe implementation.

Greater public engagement – such as the citizens' jury in Jersey – offers a practical and equitable way through the moral maze and to break the current policy deadlock.

In November 2021, the Jersey States Assembly passed in principle for assisted dying to be permitted. This was after 78% of a citizens' jury, made up of islanders, ruled it was in favour of changing the law.

The Jersey Assisted Dying Citizens' Jury was the first time a government asked a representative group of the public to come together to listen, learn and discuss the issue of assisted dying.

The Jersey States Assembly debated the Jury's recommendations before reaching a decision and have passed, in principle, that assisted dying should be permitted in Jersey. The [final report](#) from the Jury outlines their recommendations, the nuance of their discussions and how they engaged with the sheer breadth and complexity of this question.

This Jury demonstrates how governments can and should open up complex ethical and moral issues that will affect us all, such as those relating to death and dying. And, that processes like these can be used to build a consensus and find a practical way forward.

There is growing pressure for the rest of the UK to consider whether to follow Jersey's lead on the issue of assisted dying, in line with many other parts of the world. We are concerned that the current public policy debate risks becoming polarised and divorced from the public's opinions and priorities, if not managed carefully.

We believe the process in Jersey is an exemplary demonstration of how public participation can help identify sensible, public-supported ways forward on complex and morally challenging policy questions.

A [citizens' jury](#) is a group of 12 to 24 people from all walks of life, brought together to have an honest conversation & find common ground on an issue that matters. Those involved reflect the wider population in terms of demographics & relevant attitudes. They are particularly effective on value-laden and controversial questions, where knowledge is contested and there might be important ethical and social repercussions. The process generally takes between 2 and 7 days.

## **Details - what happened at the Citizens' Jury on Assisted Dying in Jersey, and why it matters.**

### ***Our approach***

In Spring 2021, the Minister for Health and Social Services commissioned a citizens' jury of 23 people from across Jersey to consider the question:

*"Should assisted dying be permitted in Jersey,  
and if so, under what circumstances?"*

The Jury heard from and questioned a range of speakers on this topic, shared their views in discussions and completed three different votes to provide a final response to the question.

Jury members had time and space to consider the myriad of conflicting and complex views on this topic, including reflecting on their own experiences, creating a richer understanding of the subject matter and leading to more informed decisions at the end of the process.

The recommendations from the Jury informed the States Assembly debate on assisted dying in November 2021.

### ***Summary of Recommendations***

- 78% of Jersey Assisted Dying Citizens' Jury members agreed assisted dying should be permitted in Jersey under the following circumstances:
  - where a Jersey resident, aged 18 or over, has a terminal illness or is experiencing unbearable suffering and wishes to end their life;

- subject to stringent safeguards including a pre-approval process; a mandatory period of reflection and consideration; with the direct assistance from doctors or nurses only, as opposed to non-medically qualified staff.

[This report](#) describes in detail the work of the citizens' jury, including its oversight structures, how members were recruited, the structure and content of the Jury meetings, and what Jury members thought about the experience of taking part.

### ***Listening to the recommendations***

The Government of Jersey committed up front to listening to the recommendations from the Jury, and bringing them to the States Assembly for consideration. At Involve, we know how important this is if citizens' time and efforts are to have an impact on decisions.

The Jury voted on its final recommendations after extensive listening; questioning of evidence and deliberating to come to their position. 78% of Jury members voted in favour of assisted dying being permitted in Jersey under specific circumstances. The Jury provided detailed considerations, suggestions, ideas, and information that lies behind the headline result of 78% in favour.

The Jury design recognised that there were nuances in this final position for different Jury members and opposition from some Jury members to the outcome. The Government of Jersey can now use the richness of these discussions and understanding of differing viewpoints that the Jury has uncovered to create better informed and more effective policy, as well as build on a public-led way forward on the issue.

### ***Conclusion***

We hope that the UK Parliament and Government further explores conversations around the question of assisted dying. We believe that a similar process to that run in Jersey would be an essential part of building a national consensus on what to do on this complex, moral issue, and building a way forward together.

***Jan 2023***