

Joint Communiqué Christian Family Life and Legislation

March 14, 2023



Communiqué 02

Catholic and Living It!

FOR: Provincial Chairpersons of Christian Family Life and Legislation
THROUGH Provincial Presidents and Secretaries
CC: National Executive (for information)
National Life Member Liaison (for information)
FROM: Dorothy Johansen, National Chairperson of Christian Family Life
Glenda Carson, National Chairperson of Legislation

Dear sisters in the League,

One of the Objects of the League is to protect the sanctity of life. An ongoing, ever-evolving sanctity of life concern is euthanasia or medical assistance in dying (MAiD). The Canadian Conference of Catholic Bishops (CCCCB) describes MAiD as the intentional taking of human life and, as such, is “a grave and morally unjustifiable act.”

The Canadian euthanasia legislation experience has been on an ever-expanding journey since the introduction of MAiD (June 2016) in Bill C-14 *An Act to amend the Criminal Code and to make related amendments to other Acts (medical assistance in dying)*. The premise at the time was that Canadians facing a terminal illness should have a choice in how they die while recognizing the need to protect Canadians who may be vulnerable to coercion to end their lives. However, pressure to further expand MAiD into more vulnerable populations resulted in Bill C-7 *An Act to amend the Criminal Code (medical assistance in dying)*, receiving royal assent in March 2021. This bill is a historic advance in expanding MAiD criteria and reducing safeguards. Those living with disabilities or mental illness (including emancipated minors) are all now considered candidates for euthanasia, even without a terminal illness.

Bill C-7 has introduced two tracks to death: new criteria allowing euthanasia for individuals whose natural death is not reasonably foreseeable and another that has shortened the time from consent to the actual performance of the procedure for those facing terminal illness. It is now possible in this circumstance for a person to ask for MAiD and be euthanized on the same day. Public and professional concerns regarding safeguards for mental illness resulted in eligibility to be held for two years for those whose sole underlying medical condition is mental illness. Though extended until March 17, 2024, to allow time to put resources in place, this delay does not mean a change to eligibility—it is just delayed. And the slope continues downward. Bill S-248 *An Act to Amend the Criminal Code (medical assistance in dying)*, is at its second reading in the Senate and aims to remove the need for final consent before being euthanized.

Increasingly vulnerable people are finding their right to life and human dignity challenged. Disability rights groups have vehemently opposed MAiD, particularly Bill C-7, from the perspective of devaluing the lives of people with disabilities. They are vulnerable to prematurely ending their lives through societal attitudes and a lack of support services. There is a need to focus on the fundamental factors underlying the use of MAiD. The CCCB draws Catholics' attention to the seriousness of this situation through its statement: "Our country's growing inability to recognize the sanctity of human life is staggering and deeply troubling."

For Canadians to have the choice envisioned through Bill C-14, there must be viable options for MAiD—access to palliative care. However, Canada ranks poorly for palliative services, scoring 22nd among 81 countries in 2021. Funding remains problematic, with many citizens needing help to access quality palliative or home care. In addition, the public needs to understand the practice of palliative care and how it is a viable, life-respecting option for MAiD.

With your diocesan counterparts, please encourage members to communicate their opposition to all levels of government regarding the ever-expanding inclusion of MAiD to those most vulnerable in society and request that the current legislative pause to include mental illness as criteria for MAiD be made permanent. Adequate educational opportunities and improvements to access palliative care services are essential. As Christians, members are called to "minimize the pain and suffering of the dying and those tempted to end their lives, not eradicate their existence." Let us help those with terminal illnesses, disabilities and chronic health conditions find meaning and comfort in their lives through our presence, love and advocacy.

The following resources provide more in-depth information and context on the Canadian legislative expansion of MAiD:

- *The Fifth Estate* episode "A Complicated Death" explores if it is too easy to die in Canada. View it at [youtube.com/watch?v=plinQAHZRvk&bpctr=1677543435](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=plinQAHZRvk&bpctr=1677543435)
- Inclusion Canada video that addresses concerns expressed by Canada's disability community to the Special Joint Committee on Medical Assistance in Dying. View it at [youtube.com/watch?v=tDaUuXwAtIw&t=1s](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=tDaUuXwAtIw&t=1s).
- Executive summary: [justice.gc.ca/eng/csj-sjc/pl/charter-charte/c7.html](https://www.justice.gc.ca/eng/csj-sjc/pl/charter-charte/c7.html)
- Legislative Summary (Find information on mental illness in section 2.2): lop.parl.ca/sites/PublicWebsite/default/en_CA/ResearchPublications/LegislativeSummaries/432C7E
- MAiD information from Canada.ca: [canada.ca/en/health-canada/services/medical-assistance-dying.html](https://www.canada.ca/en/health-canada/services/medical-assistance-dying.html)
- Recent statement from ministers (including information on amendments): [canada.ca/en/department-justice/news/2022/12/statement-by-ministers-lametti-duclos-and-bennett-on-medical-assistance-in-dying-in-canada.html](https://www.canada.ca/en/department-justice/news/2022/12/statement-by-ministers-lametti-duclos-and-bennett-on-medical-assistance-in-dying-in-canada.html)



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