



The Catholic Women's League of Canada Position Paper

TITLE: Euthanasia and Medical Assistance in Dying (MAiD)

POSITION STATEMENT

The Catholic Women's League of Canada, in accordance with the Catholic church teachings, respects human life from conception to natural death. Any deliberate killing of another human being by euthanasia/MAiD is gravely wrong, even when done out of compassion when someone is dying or there is concern about their quality of life. The League:

- affirms its support for allowing a person to die a natural death with support from palliative care.
- believes that each member of society is unique, including the underprivileged, disabled, sick or infirm, whose dignity needs to be honoured, respected and protected.
- recognizes that Canadian legislation is on a slippery slope of becoming more accepting and desensitized about euthanasia, making it available to the vulnerable populations that were protected in the initial legislation. Internationally, Canada is becoming recognized as being one of the most liberal countries regarding MAiD legislation and its application.
- urges all Canadians to reflect deeply on the consequences and dangers of giving individuals the right to take the life of another human being.

BACKGROUND

Church doctrine states euthanasia is the deliberate killing of someone by action or omission, with or without their consent, for compassionate reasons. To assist another with the deliberate intention of death is not excused, even if requested (Congregation). The *Catechism of the Catholic Church* further describes intentional euthanasia as "gravely contrary to the dignity of the human person and to the respect due to the living God, his Creator" (Vatican 2277).

The Catechism supports end-of-life measures such as palliative care. Medication to alleviate the suffering of the dying, even if it shortens their life, can be "morally in conformity with human dignity if death is not willed as either an end or a means, but only foreseen and tolerated as inevitable. Palliative care is a special form of disinterested charity" (Vatican 2279).

The Canadian Conference of Catholic Bishops (CCCC) calls for communities at all levels in Canada and internationally to promote and provide access to quality comprehensive palliative care. Every individual facing a serious or life-threatening illness has the right to improved quality of life through the prevention and relief of physical, psychosocial or spiritual suffering. The formation of "Compassionate Communities" that value human life and aim neither to hasten nor postpone death but rather view natural death as a normal part of life is especially encouraged (Office).

When all data sources are considered, the total number of medically assisted deaths reported in Canada since the introduction of federal MAiD legislation in 2016 is 44,958. In 2022, there were 13,241 MAiD provisions reported in Canada, showing a growth rate of 31.2% compared to 2021. All provinces except Manitoba and Yukon experienced consistent year-over-year growth in 2022 (Health).

Since the legalization of euthanasia in 2016, pressure has existed to expand criteria to more vulnerable populations and to include advanced consent. Bill C-7 is a historic advance in expanding criteria to those

living with disabilities, mental illness and emancipated minors without the requirement of a terminal illness. As a result, individuals, such as those living with disabilities, are finding their right to life and human dignity increasingly challenged (Ending; Whatley).

Ensuring equitable access to palliative care is a medical necessity as well as a moral and policy imperative aimed at preventing vulnerable individuals from perceiving death as their only option (Whatley). Research evidence increasingly supports that the availability and early provision of palliative care significantly influence an individual's decision to refrain from considering MAiD (Blackshaw).

Although the federal framework on palliative care was published in 2018, outlining principles and goals for its expansion, there remain differences in access and services across provinces and between urban and rural areas ("The Framework"). Most patients receive palliative care late in their final month, weeks or days (Access; Health Canada). Additionally, many Canadians do not fully understand palliative care as an alternative to MAiD due to limited awareness and misconceptions about its scope and benefits. Some incorrectly believe it is only for those nearing death or solely for cancer patients when it is actually beneficial at any stage of a serious illness and for various conditions. Other Canadians are not aware of the full range of palliative care services available or how these can manage symptoms and improve quality of life (Access; "The Framework").

SUPPORTIVE ACTIONS

- Advocate for accessible and affordable palliative care and actions that facilitate public understanding of palliative care services.
- Call on the government and all Canadians to respect the dignity of every human life and to not abandon the most vulnerable, the sick and dying.
- Advocate for the use of palliative care resources in parishes such as "Horizons of Hope" from the CCCB and the League's "12 Hours of Prayer for Palliative Care."

SUPPORTING DOCUMENTS

"Access to Palliative Care in Canada." Canadian Institute for Health Information, 2023, www.cihi.ca/sites/default/files/document/access-to-palliative-care-in-canada-2023-report-en.pdf.

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Whatley, Shawn. “More than We Imagined? Unresolved Tensions and the Current State of Physician-Assisted Suicide and Euthanasia in Canada.” *Macdonald Laurier Institute*, 20 April 2023, macdonaldlaurier.ca/more-than-we-imagined-unresolved-tensions-and-the-current-state-of-physician-assisted-suicide-and-euthanasia-in-canada/.

STATUS

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