



**Submission to the Special Joint Committee on Medical Assistance in Dying
by the Canadian Conference of Catholic Bishops
on the legal expansion of eligibility for Medical Assistance in Dying**

The Canadian Conference of Catholic Bishops is unequivocally opposed to any form of euthanasia or assisted suicide.¹ Euthanasia and assisted suicide have far-reaching consequences for how we as a society understand health care, the human person, and the common good. The legal expansion of eligibility for MAiD will only serve to erode the respect for the essential dignity of the human person and the common good of society, which must be committed to protecting and safeguarding vulnerable individuals and those without a voice.

The Special Joint Committee on Medical Assistance in Dying is reviewing the provisions of the Criminal Code and their application, including but not limited to issues relating to mature minors, advance requests, mental illness, the state of palliative care in Canada and the protection of Canadians with disabilities. Persons in unique and complex situations of human fragility will not be protected by expanding access to MAiD. It will pose significant threats to the right to life and will deter the provision of access to viable alternatives which truly promote the dignity of the human person. It will only exacerbate the already-existing dilemmas faced by families and health care providers who are forced to choose between following the dictates of their conscience and cooperating in practices that they consider unethical and contrary to their professional duty.

The experience of the Covid-19 pandemic has heightened our awareness of the importance of reaching out to those on the margins of society and in vulnerable stages or circumstances in their life. Such individuals should not be seen as a burden to society. Rather, through supportive and ongoing care, we as a society must witness to their dignity. Compassion, empathy and regard for one's neighbour is a responsibility that safeguards and sustains our shared humanity and the common good of the society which we are called to promote.

In the development of government policy, listening to other perspectives and engaging in authentic dialogue on issues that deal with the freedom and dignity of the human person should be at the core of the democratic process. Unfortunately, on the question of euthanasia and assisted suicide, the ethical perspectives brought forth by religious voices and other community groups with differing values, even after repeated submissions, have received little to no consideration from the Canadian government. This is unacceptable as it weakens and erodes the democratic society Canada claims to be.

¹ Canadian Conference of Catholic Bishops, List of publications related to the topic, Website.
<https://www.cccb.ca/faith-moral-issues/suffering-and-end-of-life/euthanasia-and-assisted-suicide/>

In light of the above, we propose the following to the Special Joint Committee:

- 1) Reject the expansion of the eligibility criteria for medical assistance in dying.
- 2) Do not remove the clause that currently excludes mental illness as a sole underlying diagnosis and engage in more extensive and credible consultations to ensure funding for mental health supportive services.
- 3) Affirm the protection of conscience rights of medical professionals and promote the mission of healthcare institutions in serving the healthcare needs of individuals without being forced to provide MAiD.
- 4) Provide evidence and effective support for substantial funding and access to palliative care services, and other viable care options for vulnerable populations.

We continue to pray for the gift of wisdom for the Special Joint Committee, and for the Government of Canada, on this crucial life issue. Our vigilance and concern on this critical issue of human dignity in our Canadian society will remain unwavering and will not cease. We will speak out on behalf of the most vulnerable who remain our brothers and sisters and support them in what they face so that they do not have to choose death. As we recently stated, along with over 50 other religious leaders, “as Canadians, we can and must do better”.²



+Raymond Poisson
Bishop of Saint-Jérôme and of Mont-Laurier
President of the Canadian Conference
of Catholic Bishops

9 May 2022

² “We can and must do *much* better. Religious Leaders in Canada Oppose Bill C-7, An Act to amend the Criminal Code MAiD”, 14 October 2020. <https://www.cccb.ca/media-release/we-can-and-must-do-much-better-religious-leaders-in-canada-denounce-bill-c-7-an-act-to-amend-the-criminal-code-medical-assistance-in-dying/>