



**MESSAGE FROM THE PERMANENT COUNCIL
TO THE CATHOLIC FAITHFUL**

**on Permitting Persons Living with Mental Illness
to Access Euthanasia/Assisted Suicide**

The Permanent Council of the Canadian Conference of Catholic Bishops (CCCBC) remains committed **to advocating for a culture of social responsibility and care for human life at all stages and in all circumstances.** In recent years, Canadians have grown in their realization that persons living with mental health challenges, including mental illnesses, and their caregivers require more support, encouragement, and resources. Individuals and families can attest that **healing and hope are possible** with the accompaniment of qualified mental health caregivers as well as the support of families and engaged communities.

The Christian faith proclaims the compassion of Jesus, who in the Gospels, brought healing, attention, and care to others (*cf. Mk 10:46-52; 7:31-37; Lk 5:17-26; 5:12-16; 7:12-15; Matt 17:14-18*). We are called, as Christians today, to continue to give witness to our Lord's actions and presence by following His example:

LET US respond with compassion and tenderness to persons struggling with mental health challenges, including mental illnesses;

LET US advocate on their behalf for greater access to professional and community supports;

LET US work to remedy factors which can adversely affect mental health, such as loneliness, marginalization, stigmatization, poverty, and abandonment.

As members of the CCCBC Permanent Council, we remain profoundly concerned about, and strongly disagree with the expansion of the 'eligibility criteria' for euthanasia and assisted suicide (i.e., 'Medical Assistance in Dying' or 'MAiD') to persons whose sole medical condition is a mental illness.^{1 2}

Expanding access to euthanasia and assisted suicide for individuals living with a mental illness closes the door to any hope of recovery. Furthermore, as the CCCBC has affirmed on a number of previous occasions, euthanasia/assisted suicide undermines the universal and inviolable dignity of human life

¹ The new expansion of the law will come into effect on 17 March 2024. Department of Justice, Government of Canada. *Statement by Ministers Lametti, Duclos and Bennett on medical assistance in dying in Canada* (15 December 2022). <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>

² Minister of Justice, *Bill C-39 An Act to amend An Act to amend the Criminal Code (medical assistance in dying)* <https://www.parl.ca/LegisInfo/en/bill/44-1/C-39?view=progress>

and harms the building up of society; it cannot be condoned under any circumstances.³ It is even more objectionable, therefore, when the government extends euthanasia/assisted suicide to individuals whose mental condition may predispose them to suicide, especially since it is known that health care across Canada is failing to provide accessible and reliable treatment for patients living with mental health challenges, including mental illnesses. To enable or assist in the suicide of these patients directly contradicts national suicide prevention strategies and reneges on our collective social responsibility to provide persons living with mental health challenges with treatment, support, and hope through therapeutic interventions.

Recognizing our common dependency on one another in varying degrees throughout life, we are called to support each other with compassionate care and meaningful encouragement. Yet, oversight bodies and news media are reporting a growing number of troubling cases of people choosing ‘MAiD’ because of loneliness, poverty, social pressure, as well as lack of support and access to care. A patient diagnosed with a terminal condition, or living in a situation of prolonged suffering must be offered whatever life-affirming relief and hope are available. Therefore, in addition to robust medical care, patients should have access to comprehensive **palliative care**.

United with many others, **we urge the Catholic faithful to continue asking the federal and provincial/territorial governments to direct more funding toward palliative care.**

We also encourage the faithful to grow in their own [education about palliative care](#) and to help raise awareness about its benefits which, on top of robust medical care, can improve the **affective, social, spiritual, and psychological well being of the patient.**⁴

We encourage individual Catholics and their families, faith communities, Catholic healthcare professionals and any other people of good will to continue courageously and unwaveringly **to witness to life, to tend to and accompany the sick, to resist pressure to support or participate in ‘MAiD,’ and to pray that our law makers may see the harm in what they are permitting to take place.**

Finally, let us not forget **to pray for those living with mental health challenges, including mental illnesses,** and for those who care for them, that God may strengthen them in hope, and that they may find the support they need from family, healthcare professionals, faith communities, and others.

9 May 2023

You may also wish to read the recent [Open Letter from the Permanent Council to the Government of Canada on Permitting Persons Living with Mental Illness to Access Euthanasia/Assisted Suicide](#), issued on 9 May 2023.

³ cf. Catholic Church. *Catechism of the Catholic Church: Revised in Accordance with the Official Latin Text Promulgated by Pope John Paul II*. Vatican City: Libreria Editrice Vaticana, 1992. n. 2276-2283. https://www.vatican.va/archive/ENG0015/_P7Z.HTM

⁴ See the recent CCCB publication that equips local faith communities to learn more about palliative care and the need for accompaniment at the end of life. Available for free download, *Horizons of Hope: A Toolkit for Catholic Parishes on Palliative care* (November 2021), <http://www.bit.ly/Horizons-of-Hope>