EFC The Evangelical Fellowship of Canada

# Action Kit on Changes to Euthanasia Law

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www.TheEFC.ca/Euthanasia

## The expansion of euthanasia in Canada

Almost 14,000 Canadians have had their lives ended by euthanasia or assisted suicide since the law was passed in 2016. The Medical Assistance in Dying (MAID) provisions allow people whose natural death is “reasonably foreseeable” to be eligible to have their lives ended by a doctor or nurse practitioner.

Bill C-7 would make significant changes to Canada’s law on “Medical Assistance in Dying,” removing crucial safeguards, such as the requirement that a person’s death must be ‘reasonably foreseeable’ to be eligible for MAID.  The Justice Minister hopes to pass this bill by December 18, 2020.

This is a key window of time to speak to MPs to ask them to protect life and to care for vulnerable Canadians.

Bill C-7 proposes several major changes to the law.

It removes the end-of-life requirement from the laws on euthanasia. A person’s death would not have to be “reasonably foreseeable” to be eligible for medical assistance in dying.

It sets up two tracks of assisted death. One track was for people whose death is foreseeable and the other track for people who are not dying in the foreseeable future. Each track has its own requirements and safeguards.

The bill removes key safeguards from the track for people who are not dying. It takes away the 10-day reflection period between the time of the request for MAID and the provision of MAID. It only requires one witness instead of two and would permit the one witness to be a paid caregiver of the person making the request.

The bill also allows a person’s life to be ended (in some circumstances) when the person is no longer able to consent.

For more information, see TheEFC.ca/Bill C-7.

## Why do these changes matter?

Removing the end-of-life requirement is a watershed change. It will mean that people who are not dying could be eligible to have their lives ended.

Every national disability rights organization in Canada opposes this change. People with disabilities already fight to receive needed care and support to live on an equal basis with other Canadians. This change makes people with disabilities eligible for hastened death *because* they have a disability. As people with disabilities and their advocates wrote in an open letter to the Justice Minister last fall,

> Without the equalizing effect of the end-of-life criterion, which guarantees that the common thread between all persons who access an assisted death in Canada is that they are all dying, persons with disabilities will be able to gain access ultimately because they have a disability. A worse stereotype couldn't be institutionalized in law – that disability-related suffering, largely caused by lack of support and inequality, justifies the termination of a person's life.

This change communicates that the lives of people with disabilities are not worth living because of their disability. It also increases the risk that they will be pressured to end their lives. One disability advocate told us, "Our lives are on the line."

As Krista Carr of Inclusion Canada (formerly the Canadian Association for Community Living) told the Justice Committee this fall,

> Including disability as a condition warranting assisted suicide equates to declaring some lives as not worth living, a historically horrific premise with consequences that should terrify us all, and clearly terrifies the disability community and their families…
>
> Bill C-7 further devalues the lives of people with disabilities and fundamentally changes MAID from physician-assisted dying near the end of life to physician-assisted suicide on the basis of disability.

More Canadians are ending their lives through euthanasia or assisted suicide each year. The government's most recent report says that 5,631 people died by MAID in 2019, compared to 4,467 in 2018 and 2,833 in 2017. That's an increase of 26% in 2019 over the previous year.

Making euthanasia available to people whose death isn't foreseeable will significantly increase the number of people who could be eligible for hastened death. Ending a person's life will increasingly be seen as the appropriate response to suffering or difficult life circumstances. More and more Canadians may choose to end their lives in the face of suffering.

When asked what caused their suffering, one-third of people who died by MAID said it was because they felt like a burden to their loved ones and caregivers. Approximately one in seven (13.7%) said their suffering was due to isolation or loneliness. The majority (82%) said their suffering was due to their inability to participate in life activities they considered meaningful.

There are compassionate responses to loneliness, feeling like a burden and the loss of meaningful activities that don't involve ending the life of a person. We should hear these reasons as a call to reach out compassionately to our neighbours more than ever, even as we contact our MPs on this issue.

## How to contact government officials

This is a key window of time to contact local MPs and provincial Senators.

MPs are currently debating the bill and are able to vote for changes. Senators will soon study and have a chance to propose changes to the bill.

Step 1 - Find your MP's contact info using your postal code at www.ourcommons.ca/members/en. Find the Senators in your province at https://sencanada.ca/en/senators/.

Step 2 – Make contact with your MP. There are at least three ways to communicate, as you will see below. For greater impact, contact your MP in more than one way. For example, send a letter and then follow up with a phone call. Or, send a letter after a phone call or meeting. See TheEFC.ca/CivicEngagement for more tips on simple, effective action.

*Leave a message with MP's staff*

- Hi, my name is ________. I live in the riding on ______ street, in _______ community. I appreciate the way your office serves our community.
- I'm calling today because I want to let our MP know that I'm concerned about Bill C-7 and its changes to the Medical Assistance in Dying law. Disability groups are calling Bill C-7 their worst nightmare. Canada shouldn't expand the law so that Canadians with disabilities are eligible for euthanasia *because* of their disability.
- Can you let our MP know that I don't want eligibility for euthanasia to be expanded or for safeguards to be removed, and that I'd like him/her to oppose it? Thanks for speaking with me.

*Meet with your MP*

- Note that some MPs may be meeting by video, rather than in person, because of the pandemic.

- Call to request a meeting. Be ready with a brief reason for the meeting, such as “I’m concerned about the changes to the Medical Assistance in Dying law in Bill C-7 and I’d like to meet to talk about this issue.”
- Expect to meet for about 20-30 minutes.
- Be prepared with a brief description of why you’re concerned and the action you’d like the MP to take. Use wording from the description of Planned changes to the euthanasia law and from the Talking Points (below).

*Write or send an email to your MP and Senators from your province:*

Dear [MP or Senator’s name],

I am very concerned about Bill C-7 and the changes to Canada’s law on medical assistance in dying (MAID).

Every national disability organization in Canada opposes Bill C-7. They say that removing the end of life requirement from the MAID law discriminates against them and puts their lives at even greater risk.

Safeguards in the MAID law are intended to protect Canadians from abuse and harm. I urge you to not to remove the safeguards of the 10-day reflection period, the ability to consent at the time of death and the requirement for two independent witnesses.

The government does have other options in responding to the Quebec lower court decision in the *Truchon* case. It should propose a different end of life requirement for the MAID law.

I urge you to hear the concerns of people with disabilities. Please oppose or make significant changes to Bill C-7. Also, please add specific, meaningful conscience protection for healthcare workers and institutions to Bill C-7.

Sincerely,

[your name]
[your address]

## Talking points for an effective conversation

**Every national disability rights organization in Canada opposes Bill C-7.** Krista Carr of Inclusion Canada (formerly the Canadian Association for Community Living) describes it as their worst nightmare.

**In Canada, it shouldn't be easier to die than to get the support and care a person needs to live.** It is already difficult for people with disabilities to get needed care and support. Disability groups are very concerned the government plans to change the law so people who aren't dying can be eligible for euthanasia. As one advocate told us, "Our lives are on the line."

**Taking away the end-of-life requirement discriminates against people with disabilities.** It makes a person eligible for euthanasia simply *because* they have a disability.

**Only 15% of people receive palliative home care. This isn't real choice for end-of-life decisions.** Palliative care should be available to everyone. The government's first priority should be to expand access to palliative care.

**The government *does not have to* change the law in line with a court decision.** Although a lower court in Quebec struck down the requirement of "reasonably foreseeable" death in the *Truchon* decision, Parliament can and should re-introduce an end-of-life requirement in a new bill. If there are concerns about whether it is constitutional, the government could ask the Supreme Court to rule on the legal question.

**The government plans to remove important safeguards**. It plans to remove the 10-day reflection period after someone asks for their life to be ended. This would mean a person could have their life ended on the same day they make the request.

**We must do all we can to support a person facing the end of life or a serious illness or disability.** Each person's life is valuable and worthy of respect. A person's worth does not depend on their ability level or physical health.

**Many people who choose to have their lives ended are lonely and discouraged.** One-third of the people who received assisted death in 2019 described their suffering as feeling like a burden. Almost one in seven described their suffering as loneliness or isolation. A compassionate response is to encourage and walk alongside them.

**We support the palliative care approach.** No one is required to receive medical treatment that prolongs or shortens their life.