

MAiD for mental illness – Talking points on how to explain concerns

A law was passed in 2021 allowing voluntary euthanasia when mental illness is a person's only medical condition. This change in the law will take effect on March 17, 2024.

Experts say it is very difficult to predict the course of an individual patient's illness, and to know whether an individual patient will improve or not. This means a patient whose condition might have improved over time and with treatment may have their life ended through medical assistance in dying (MAiD).

A lack of hope for the future and a belief that things won't change or get better can be a symptom of some mental illnesses. Thoughts of suicide or a desire to end one's life can also be a symptom. **It is very difficult to distinguish thoughts of suicide from a request for MAiD.**

Mental illness may affect a person's ability to make decisions. Patients experiencing mental health crises are generally discouraged from making major decisions while in crisis. This can make it difficult to assess whether a patient is truly able to consent to MAiD. This is one of the many reasons this expansion to the law is so dangerous and ill-advised.

This change in the law is coming at a time when the health care system is under extreme stress and many people are unable to find adequate health care. The Centre for Addiction and Mental Health says that 1/3 to 1/2 of Canadians with mental illness weren't getting their mental health needs met *before* the pandemic worsened the mental health crisis and increased the burden on the health care system.

Many Canadians who struggle with mental illness aren't able to access the care they need, when they need it. There may be long waiting lists for treatment. Some kinds of treatment may not be covered by government-funded healthcare and may be expensive. A person who can't afford treatment or can't access it because of a long waiting list may be more likely to request MAiD. **It shouldn't be easier to obtain MAiD than it is to obtain mental health care or other needed medical or social supports.**

The law doesn't have any safeguards specifically related to people who ask for MAiD when mental illness is their only medical condition. People say that MAiD will be a last resort after long attempts at other treatment have failed, but this isn't actually what the law requires.

Since MAiD eligibility was expanded to people who aren't dying, we have heard many accounts of people asking for MAiD because they don't have the support needed to live. People struggling with mental illness already face stigma and discrimination. They may have trouble accessing health care or finding work, and may not have a secure income or housing. Many more Canadians in vulnerable situations will be put at risk with MAiD for mental illness.

MAiD must not serve as Canada's response to those who suffer.

We hope you can use these talking points to inform others about the upcoming MAiD expansion and have impactful discussions. For more information and resources, see TheEFC.ca/TakeActionOnMAiD.