

Joint statement on forced transfers for medical assistance in dying

Medical assistance in dying (MAID) is a constitutionally protected right in Canada. However, institutional barriers to accessing that right remain rife in the healthcare system. Obstructionist policies have created harmful delays and confusion for Canadians who are already suffering intolerably on account of their medical conditions.

Healthcare facilities' bans on MAID are among the most troubling barriers facing Canadians who wish to exercise their right to choice. A recent article in *The Globe and Mail* demonstrates how these bans on MAID threatens residents' rights, traumatizes their loved ones, and impedes clinicians in their efforts to provide their patients with the best possible care. The story also sheds light on the dramatic lengths that some healthcare practitioners have to go to in order to ensure that physically compromised individuals in their care are not denied their right to a peaceful death.

Facilities that receive public funds for healthcare have a duty to provide basic and essential health services to the communities they serve. Thus, we believe that MAID should be permitted in all publicly funded health facilities, including hospitals, hospices and long-term care homes. Forced transfers are discriminatory and they undermine the principles of universal, equitable access to healthcare – principles that have been part of our national identity for more than 50 years.

We demand that all publicly funded hospitals and hospices respect and accommodate Canadians' right to request, be assessed for and receive medical assistance in dying without the requirement to be transferred elsewhere. We support healthcare professionals who, as a matter of conscience and compassion, help their patients overcome unfair barriers to access. And we will defend clinicians who are attacked or punished for their participation in the lawful provision of MAID. These courageous individuals should be applauded, not penalized, for putting their patients first.

Quotes:

“Canadians who are eligible for medical assistance in dying are some of this country's most vulnerable, physically compromised patients. Forcing these individuals to be transferred – in their time of greatest need – in order to access their right to a peaceful death is as cruel as it is impractical. It flies in the face of the values of compassion and equitable access that are enshrined in Canada's public healthcare system.

We applaud the courage of families and clinicians who speak publicly about their experiences with forced transfers. And, we encourage others who similarly have experienced the discrimination and stigmatization of forced transfers to contact our organization.”

– Shanaaz Gokool, CEO, Dying With Dignity Canada

“MAID providers, like all medical professionals, have a number of professional and personal responsibilities the first of which, according to the CMA Code of Ethics is to “consider first the well-being of the patient.” That job becomes much more difficult when healthcare facilities impose barriers for the most vulnerable individuals in our care. While we suggest our colleagues become knowledgeable about and respect various facilities' rules and regulations, we will continue to strongly support our colleagues who put their patients well-being first and are working to change unfair obstacles to best medical practice.

We are proud of our colleagues who are working to break down these barriers. These brave clinicians embody the values of compassion, service and respect that are at the heart of our profession.”

– Dr. Stefanie Green, president, Canadian Association of MAID Assessors and Providers