



**OPEN LETTER FROM THE PERMANENT COUNCIL
TO THE GOVERNMENT OF CANADA**

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

To the Government of Canada,

The Permanent Council of the Canadian Conference of Catholic Bishops (CCCBC) remains deeply concerned that the federal government is in the process of expanding 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. Despite repeated calls of profound concern from mental health experts and a recent poll showing that only 31% of Canadians support such legislation,¹ the federal government forges ahead with expanding access to MAiD to persons living with mental illness, coming into effect on 17 March 2024.^{2 3}

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 and harms the building up of society. 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 for 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 each other in varying degrees throughout life, we are called to support one another with compassionate care and meaningful encouragement. 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 and social support. Oversight bodies and news media are reporting a growing number of troubling cases of people choosing MAiD because of loneliness, poverty, social pressure, lack of support, and access to

¹ Angus Reid Institute, “Mental Health and MAiD: Canadians question looming changes to Canada’s assisted-death law.” 13 February 2023. <https://angusreid.org/assisted-dying-maid-mental-health>

² 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>

³ 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>

care. United with many others, including medical professionals, we urge the government of Canada, as well as provincial and territorial governments, to invest much more in palliative care in order to promote and attend to the physical, affective, social, spiritual, and psychological needs of the human person.

Consistent with our strong objection to euthanasia/assisted suicide, we implore the federal government to heed the concerns voiced by many mental health experts, mental health and disability advocacy groups, communities, families, and individuals and to repeal entirely or permanently suspend the expansion of ‘MAiD’ to persons whose sole medical condition is a mental illness.

9 May 2023