



**L'Arche Canada Submission to the
Special Joint Committee on Physician-Assisted Dying
01 February 2016**

"It is always the most fragile among us who are the closest to their humanity, to their suffering, and to their need to be loved. It is they who show the rest of us the way to live in truth and in love." (Jean Vanier, 2013)

L'Arche communities ¹ across Canada have considerable experience walking with some of Canada's most vulnerable citizens through the difficult time of preparing for death. In light of this experience, we ask that the Special Joint Committee on Physician-Assisted Dying consider the following points for inclusion in the draft of its final report:

- In response to the SCC ruling, and as the Federal Government works on drafting legislation on this issue, L'Arche in Canada has re-committed itself to providing the best possible supports for the people with intellectual disabilities in our communities, both in life and as they approach death.
- Having operated now within Canada's disability sector for 47 years, L'Arche has gained considerable experience working with health and pastoral care professionals in providing quality palliative care to people with intellectual disabilities in the process of preparing for death. Through this experience, we have learned that governments across the country are simply not doing enough to provide the necessary financial and other supports to ensure effective and universally accessible palliative care. *[For more information, or to review resources developed by L'Arche Canada to assist families and organizations in dealing with issues related to aging and disability, visit www.aging-and-disability.org (English) / www.deficience-et-veillissement.org (French).]*
- Palliative care should be a guaranteed option for anyone facing death in this country. Without the support of a loving family or circle of friends, and with no guaranteed access to palliative care, any person facing death will be more at risk of experiencing abuse and error within the health care system.
- Now that physician-assisted dying is legal in Canada, it is more important than ever for Canadians to reflect upon the question: *"What really is our commitment to one another as citizens of this great country, not only in life, but in those times when we need to help one another face death?"* If we truly are committed to one another as citizens who believe in the values of compassion, generosity, and social justice, then it is not enough for Parliament simply to put safeguards in place to protect vulnerable people from potential abuses and errors within the health care system. We need to commit as well to finding the resources that will help us, at a minimum,
 - to expand home care services and supports for community/independent living, and
 - to ensure that access to palliative care becomes a universally available health care service.



RECOMMENDATIONS

1. That Parliament reject Recommendations 22 - 27 of the Final Report of the Provincial-Territorial Expert Advisory Group, on the grounds that those recommendations fail to ensure the safeguards necessary for protecting vulnerable persons from potential abuse and neglect under a new system for physician-assisted dying. Necessary safeguards include (1) mandatory vulnerability assessments and psychiatric evaluations, (2) requiring the involvement of a panel of people, rather than just two physicians in the decision-making process, and (3) a mandatory waiting period at the outset for persons who are not terminally ill.
2. That Parliament establish a new National Palliative Care Secretariat with a mandate to provide the leadership required to ensure that palliative care becomes a universally available and accessible home and health care service in Canada, involving the coordinated and collaborative involvement of organizations both within the governmental and non-governmental sectors.
3. That Parliament provide funding that will enable the provinces and territories to ensure reasonable and humane supports for organizations and families responsible for the care of people with disabilities and aging members of society.

¹ Founded in 1964 by Jean Vanier, son of former Governor General Georges P. Vanier and Pauline Vanier, L'Arche is an international federation of communities (agencies) dedicated to the creation and growth of homes, programs, and support networks with people who have intellectual disabilities. In Canada, L'Arche has 29 centers of operation involving thousands of people with and without visible disabilities who have come together to build communities where the gifts and contribution of every person can be recognized and valued, and where everyone is supported to find a place of belonging. For more information, visit www.larche.ca.