

Briefing Note to the Special Joint Committee on Physician-Assisted Dying
Ms. Louise Bradley
Mental Health Commission of Canada
February 12, 2016

The Mental Health Commission of Canada (MHCC) would like to take this opportunity to share with Committee members our observations as Canada moves forward with federal legislation on physician-assisted death. Subsequent to the Supreme Court ruling this past February, the Mental Health Commission of Canada (MHCC) has been monitoring the public and professional conversations with regard to the mental health implications of legalized physician-assisted death. In response to these conversations, we have two major areas of concern:

- 1) In particular, we note a considerable lack of consensus surrounding the implications, applicability and potential safeguards for people with mental illnesses. There are also a number of contentious issues pertaining to competency assessments and the role of mental health in decision-making for people with physical morbidities who may be considering physician-assisted death. Both of these dimensions will require a great deal of definitional clarity in order to inform policies and safeguards.
- 2) There is also an additional issue surrounding the health and safety of physicians and clinicians during this process that must be taken into consideration. Proper processes and supports need to be put into place to protect employees from psychological injury and harm. The MHCC emphasizes that the importance of awareness raising and good practice education strategies in supporting health professionals, caregivers and patients in the implementation of policies and regulations that apply to physician-assisted death.

The mandate of the MHCC is primarily as a convener of the stakeholder community at the national level, creating consensus on key issues, and to make recommendations on how best to improve the systems that are directly related to mental health care. If the Committee would like to utilize the MHCC in this capacity, we would be pleased to support them.

If you have any further questions for the MHCC, please do not hesitate to contact Stephanie Machel, Director of Stakeholder Relations, in my office at 613-683-3928.

Sincerely,



Louise Bradley
President & CEO