



**Council of Canadians
with Disabilities**

A VOICE OF OUR OWN

**Conseil des Canadiens
avec déficiences**

CETTE VOIX QUI EST LA NOTRE

February 3, 2016

Honourable Kelvin Kenneth Ogilvie, Joint Chair
Robert Oliphant, Joint Chair
Special Joint Committee on Physician-Assisted Dying
Sixth Floor, 131 Queen Street
House of Commons
Ottawa ON K1A 0A6
Via E-mail: PDAM@parl.gc.ca

Dear Mr. Ogilvie and Mr. Oliphant:

On January 28, 2016, when we, Rhonda Wiebe and Dean Richert, appeared before the Special Joint Committee on Physician-Assisted Dying on behalf of the Council of Canadians with Disabilities (CCD), we were asked to provide you CCD's views on the 2014 poll commissioned by Dying with Dignity and conducted by Ipsos-Reid Poll on physician-assisted dying. Please accept this letter as CCD's response to your request.

When the poll was made public, we reviewed the poll for CCD and set out our concerns about the poll's shortcomings. We found several areas that were problematic about the poll's approach. These are as follows:

1. The margin of error in identifying persons with disabilities is stated as “+/- 11.5 percent.” This is abnormally high. Out of a sample of 2515 only 95 people identified as having a disability.
2. One of the questions asked specifically related to the inclusion of safeguards as a prerequisite for assisted dying stating “as long as strong safeguards are in place.” There is nothing defining of what those safeguards are or should be.
3. There was no definition of terminally ill or unbearable suffering. Is this suffering related to physical pain or psychological pain and anxiety?
4. The question, “Have you been close to someone who suffered terribly before they died?” again does not define the nature of the suffering.

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5. The question, "Do you think most Canadians support or oppose legalizing assisted dying for the terminally ill?" simply gives perception of others' opinion.
6. The palliative care question includes the perception that palliative care "**cannot always** relieve patients of unbearable pain and suffering." Again, there is nothing to indicate the positive aspects of good palliative care or how seldom pain cannot be relieved.
7. In the "scenarios in which a patient should have the right to choose assisted dying" there is a description of a "permanent and severe physical disability that significantly impacts quality of life and the ability to carry out basic activities of daily living." This goes far beyond those with "terminal illness" and people with quadriplegia.
8. The question, "To what extent do you agree or disagree with the following statements? People should be able to decide for themselves when and how to die if they are terminally ill and their quality of life becomes intolerable." Is this question only to apply to people who are terminally ill or does the "and" mean to include those who find their "quality of life intolerable"?

The questions in this poll are not clear and the number of people with disabilities is inadequate to draw the conclusions Dying with Dignity draw about assisted suicide.

It is clear that the questions found in the survey are often not carefully crafted nor neutral in a way that would enable the researches any clear inference upon which to conclude that a majority of Canadians would support permitting legalized voluntary euthanasia or physician assisted suicide. Surveys/polls can skew the real concerns over this issue.

When the 2014 Ipsos Reid poll was made public CCD, along with the Canadian Association for Community Living (CACL), issued a press release, in which we shared with Canadians our concerns about the poll commissioned by Dying with Dignity. The media release is attached.

Sincerely,



For/

Dean Richert
Co-chair
CCD Ending of Life Ethics Committee

Attachment

Sincerely,



For/

Rhonda Wiebe
Co-chair
CCD Ending of Life Ethics Committee



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50 years
Canadian Association
for Community Living
Association canadienne pour
l'intégration communautaire

Diversity includes. On se ressemble.

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

Toronto and Winnipeg

October 9, 2014

Ipsos-Reid Poll on 'Assisted Dying': Flawed Data and Disappointing Analysis

The Council of Canadians with Disabilities (CCD) and the Canadian Association for Community Living (CACL) find the poll results released yesterday on “medically-assisted dying” to be a disappointing contribution to a complex debate. Not only does the question in the poll confuse the issues, it seeks to tap into only one dimension of the values that motivate Canadians. No reasonable assessment of the methodology for the poll can consider that the results accurately portray the views of Canadians with disabilities. How can an online survey of ninety-four, self-selected people with disabilities be interpreted to say 85% of Canadians with disabilities “support medically assisted dying”? Ipsos Reid would likely concur on these points, if asked.

There is no doubt that the large majority of Canadians feel compassion for those who are suffering and wish to die with dignity. But the debate about legislative changes to the Criminal Code involves other issues too. Canadians believe in hospice and palliative care and CCD and CACL remain concerned that the policy choice of adequate investment in such care has not been put on the table to address the real and legitimate fears of Canadians that they will die in pain and without support.

We believe that Canadians feel very strongly about the need to protect vulnerable people in our society and ensure they are not put at further risk. CCD and CACL wish, in constructive ways, to bring public attention to the complexity of this issue. There is a need for a fulsome understanding of the potential impact of any change in the law. Canadians value not only compassion but fairness.

Contact

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