

To: Special Joint Committee on Medical Assistance in Dying

April 26, 2022

As you reconvene as a committee, I ask that you thoughtfully consider the risks of offering assisted suicide to those with mental illness and use this opportunity to recommend to the government that the sunset clause allowing MAiD for mental illness be removed before it can come into effect in March of next year.

As I'm sure you're aware, when Bill C-7 was passed in 2021 it opened MAiD up to those with disabilities as well as those with mental illness. Mental illness, however, was given a unique "sunset clause" provision so that it did not come into effect immediately. The Senate slid this addition into Bill C-7 with no empirical support and little time for discussion in the House of Commons.

In a society that is making progress to combat the stigma associated with mental illness, it is a step backwards to offer suicide assistance to those who need suicide prevention. It would make Canada one of the most permissive countries in the world when it comes to euthanasia – a dubious distinction when talking about the permanent ending of the lives of some of society's most vulnerable.

A very real concern with the expansion of MAiD is copycat, or coupling, effects when it comes to suicide. Evidence repeatedly shows that, following a publicized celebrity suicide, suicide rates in the area increase, especially among those in a similar demographic. The connection is further proven by the fact that the means used to commit suicide disproportionately mirror the method reportedly used by the celebrity. Research also shows that suicide is often coupled to a certain place, environment, or event – so if the right setting is not present or available, *the suicide will not take place*.

While advocates for MAiD like to view it as distinct from other forms of suicide, in fact MAiD normalizes suicide as a solution to suffering. People suffering from mental illness, who may already struggle with suicidal ideation, may see MAiD as an accessible and relatively clean way to end their lives. The media's tendency to report stories in a positive light of people choosing MAiD will inadvertently push others to request MAiD. Based on the wealth of research that demonstrates a "social contagion" aspect to suicide, it is no surprise that the annual statistical reports indicate a steady increase in MAiD deaths.

Suicide prevention needs to remain a priority across the lifespan, for all Canadians. Anything else requires value judgements about the worthiness of another's life – judgments that no human being should be making.

The Council of Canadian Academies, tasked with studying euthanasia in the context where mental illness is the sole underlying condition, expressed deep reservations about allowing MAiD in this context. Their report, commissioned by the government after the 2016 legalization of euthanasia, was largely ignored. But including a sunset clause on MAiD for euthanasia was a tacit acknowledgement of the lack of public discussion and in-depth research on this issue. It is our hope that your report can build on the work of the CCA and again bring the government's attention to the harms of expanding euthanasia to those with mental illness.

As your committee considers its recommendations, we ask that you include clear opposition to the expansion of MAiD to those with mental illness.

Sincerely, on behalf of the *Care Not Kill* campaign,

Anna Nienhuis  
Policy Analyst  
[anna@arpacanada.ca](mailto:anna@arpacanada.ca)