



Canadian Academy of Child and
Adolescent Psychiatry

Académie canadienne de psychiatrie de
l'enfant et de l'adolescent

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**Brief to the Special Joint Committee on Medical
Assistance in Dying**

***Concerns & Considerations with Applying MAiD for
Persons Whose Sole Underlying Medical Condition is a
Mental Disorder to Mature Minors***

May 9 2022

Medical Assistance in Dying (MAiD) for persons whose sole underlying medical condition is a mental disorder is quite complex, particularly when applied to mature minors whose sole underlying medical condition is a mental disorder. A necessary comprehensive response for such an important topic requires involved discussion.

As child and adolescent psychiatrists, we consider the developmental age and stage of a child and youth, as this impacts capacity to consent to treatment. Youth and young adults may be developmentally younger than their chronological age for a variety of reasons, including age of onset of illness, as well as cognitive and learning struggles. Age of consent to treatment varies by province.

We view the family as important for support, collateral information, decision making, consideration of impact, and intervention.

We tend to take a hopeful and protective stance. We view mental illness as treatable: it would be unlikely that a mental disorder would be deemed irremediable before a capable minor reaches the age of majority. We appreciate that prognosis is difficult to predict for youth and that, as the brain continues to develop into the mid-20s, it is unlikely that a mental disorder would be considered incurable in a developing brain. As such, it would be hard to determine irremediability before age 25. This is of relevance not only to mature minors but also to young adults.

We know that suicide is the second leading cause of death for youth in Canada age 15-24 and are concerned by the message that may be sent to suicidal youth that dying is a solution for suffering. Transitional age youth face a number of challenges including onset or worsening of mental illness along with expected life transitions (school, work, family). Expanding MAiD to youth and young adults with mental illness at this vulnerable time could carry significant risks. Further, suicidality can be a symptom of a mental illness and as such, it may be hard to separate out suicidal patients from those seeking MAiD for mental illness.

We know that there are challenges with access to specialized mental health care, something which has only been exacerbated by the pandemic, with disproportionate impacts on socially disadvantaged groups. Advocacy is required for universal access to specialized mental health care and attending to suffering.

We know that physical health and social determinants of health affect mental health. We need to ensure health equity by addressing those with social, economic and health disparities.

We have a duty to protect our most vulnerable.

The Canadian Academy of Child and Adolescent Psychiatry is a national organization of 480 child and adolescent psychiatrists and other professionals in Canada, committed to advancing the mental health of children, youth and families through promotion of excellence in care, advocacy, education, research and collaboration with other professionals.

Respectfully,



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