

Medical Assistance in Dying: For Patients & Families

What you should know

In response to the Supreme Court's decision, Parliament passed legislation on medical assistance in dying (MAID) on June 17, 2016. This legislation allows eligible adults to request medical assistance in dying and includes rules on who is eligible and outlines safeguards that must be followed to ensure public protection. According to the federal legislation, MAID refers to an individual seeking and obtaining the assistance of a physician or nurse practitioner (NP) to end his/her life.

In accordance with federal legislation, for an individual to access medical assistance in dying, he/she must:

- Be eligible for publicly funded health services in Canada
- Be at least 18 years of age and capable of making decisions with respect to their health
- Have a grievous and irremediable medical condition (including an illness, disease, or disability)
- Make a voluntary request for medical assistance in dying that is not the result of external pressure
- Provide informed consent to receive medical assistance in dying after having been informed of the means that are available to relieve their suffering, including palliative care

The issue of medical assistance in dying is complex and raises many questions. Catholic health care providers across Ontario and across Canada are consulting with many of our physicians, principles, Mission and Values.

As an organization, does HDGH support Medical Assistance in Dying?

HDGH recognizes the Supreme Court ruling as a significant decision related to end-of-life care and that MAID is now federally legislated. We understand that there will be questions from the people we serve and our staff, physicians and volunteers as a result of the decision.

HDGH does not provide medical assistance in dying or voluntary euthanasia. Our response to requests for MAID will seek to ensure we do not risk abandoning those in our care, nor abandon our commitment to clinician integrity (faith/morals) or institutional integrity (Values, Approach to Care).

This approach is in alignment with our Catholic Health identity and is reflective of the Health Ethics Guide and Catholic teachings.

What if a patient requests to proceed with seeking MAID once all treatment and end of life options have been discussed by the Physician and/or NP?

As a Catholic Health sponsored organization, our staff Physicians and Nurse Practitioners cannot participate in providing MAID assessment or procedures. However, their respective

regulatory colleges require that a “transfer of care” must be provided. This means that a transfer of care will be made in good faith, to a non-objecting, available and accessible physician, nurse practitioner or agency. The transfer must be made in a timely manner to allow patients to access MAID and patients must not be exposed to adverse clinical outcomes due to delayed transfers.

Will Medical Assistance in Dying be offered in HDGH Palliative Care Unit or through any of our clinical programs?

HDGH is committed to treat each person we serve with respect, dignity and compassion. We believe that staying engaged with the patient, client or resident in a non-judgemental, non-coercive way and helping to explore the nature of a person’s request for MAID is completely consistent with our moral and ethical traditions.

While HDGH will care for patients, clients or residents who request MAID, we will not compromise our institutional integrity and actually provide assisted suicide or voluntary euthanasia. We remain committed to person-centred care, and will continue to provide services to patients, clients, residents and families according to our Mission to meet physical, emotional, social and spiritual needs of each person.

Is MAID the same as refusing or withdrawing lifesaving interventions?

Catholic health care has a long standing moral tradition that neither prolongs dying nor hastens death. Catholic health care organizations support individuals making informed and conscientious decisions about their end of life care. This includes deciding when to refuse or withdraw life-sustaining interventions, and receiving effective pain and symptom management to lessen pain and suffering.

Do Catholic health care organizations have the right not to provide Medical Assistance in Dying based on religious beliefs?

Yes. The Local Health System Integration Act, 2006, is clear that faith-based organizations are not required to provide a service contrary to its religious beliefs.

What makes HDGH Catholic?

Catholic Health International (CHI) serves as sponsor and the sole shareholders of 22 member organizations, including HDGH. All meet the "faith based" intent as included in the Local Health System Integration Act, given the legacy of the founding religious Sisters and today's accountability directly to the Holy See (Vatican). This is the chain of mission principle that is so important in Catholic health care.

For more general information on MAID please refer to the following Ontario website
<https://www.ontario.ca/page/medical-assistance-dying-and-end-life-decisions>