



The **Catholic Bishops**
of **Alberta**

Les **évêques catholiques**
de **l'Alberta**

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February 25, 2016

Re: Medical Assistance In Dying: A Patient-Centred Approach

Report of the Special Joint Committee on Physician-Assisted Dying

The report released today is deeply disappointing to all of us who have raised concerns about the proposed legalization of Physician-Assisted suicide and euthanasia.

We do welcome the report's recommendations for enhanced palliative care services across the country. But language must be clear. Palliative care excludes assisted suicide and euthanasia. It is morally unacceptable to describe hastened death as a treatment option or form of care.

As bishops we continue to study the document, but at first reading we find that many of its recommendations go far beyond the mandate stemming from the Supreme Court of Canada Carter decision. That decision was, itself, a grave disappointment, since, as we have said, it makes legally permissible in some circumstances what is morally wrong in every circumstance.

If implemented, these recommendations of the Special Joint Committee, far from limiting the harm of the Carter decision, would expand it. We would fail to protect some of the most vulnerable people among us -- children, the mentally ill, the socially or economically disadvantaged – and force physicians to be involved in a practice in which most of them have said they do not wish to participate.

Again, we call for the use of language that is clear. This is not a matter of "medical assistance in dying." What is at issue here is state-sponsored killing of the innocent. Killing is not medicine. This has no place in a just and ethical society.

Among the troubling recommendations are:

- **“That individuals not be excluded from eligibility for medical assistance in dying based on the fact that they have a psychiatric condition.”**

We know that psychiatric conditions such as depression can lead to suicide. Most Canadians would agree that we must do everything we can to help these patients recover and go on to lead productive and meaningful lives.

Persons suffering from mental illness are in a vulnerable state, and therefore need care and protection so that they can heal -- not assistance in ending their lives.

- **Recommendations that would allow “advance requests” for physician-assisted suicide or euthanasia, or that would make children eligible for these forms of death, are also morally and ethically objectionable.** As the Dissenting Report by four members of the Special Joint Committee points out, many of these recommendations go far beyond what was contemplated in the Supreme Court decision.
- **“That the government of Canada work with the provinces and territories to ensure that all publicly funded health care institutions provide medical assistance in dying.”**
This is unacceptable at Catholic hospitals, which are committed to the compassionate care of patients to the natural end of life. Canadians have a right to be served by doctors and institutions that practice only medicine and are not involved in state-sponsored killing. They must not be deprived of access to such just because there are other citizens who desire assistance in committing suicide.
- **“At a minimum, the objecting practitioner must provide an effective referral for the patient.”**
A physician who conscientiously objects to these practices must not be coerced into referring a patient to another professional for assisted suicide or to be euthanized. This would, in fact, be complicity and thus a violation of the person’s right to freedom of conscience. Furthermore, medical professionals who refuse for reasons of conscience direct or indirect participation must also be protected from intimidation and discrimination.

We urge all Catholics and all Canadians to read this report carefully, and communicate their concerns to their loved ones, their physicians, and their Members of Parliament.

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Most Reverend Richard W. Smith
Archbishop of Edmonton

Most Reverend David Motiuk
Bishop of the Ukrainian Eparchy of Edmonton

Most Reverend Frederick Henry
Bishop of Calgary

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