

Medical Assistance in Dying: Questions and Answers

What is medical assistance in dying? (MedAid)

The Government of Canada passed legislation (Bill C-14) allowing a physician or nurse practitioner (NP) to assist the death of certain individuals. Sometimes called physician assisted death (PAD), medical assistance in dying is the act of accelerating death by means of a fatal intravenous injection upon request of an eligible patient.

Who is eligible for an assisted death?

An individual must meet ALL of the following conditions:

- Be eligible for healthcare in Canada.
- Be at least 18 years of age.
- Be capable of making decisions regarding his or her health.
- Have a grave and incurable illness, disease or disability.
- Be in an advanced state of irreversible decline in capability.
- Be in enduring physical or psychological suffering caused by the medical condition or state of decline that is intolerable to the person.
- Natural death may become reasonably foreseeable. If not reasonably foreseeable a physician or nurse practitioner will discuss options with you.
- Make a voluntary request for medical assistance in dying that is not a result of external pressure.
- Provide informed consent to receive medical assistance in dying.

The individual must personally consent to medical assistance in dying. Another person, often called a substitute decision-maker, cannot consent or make the request. Consent can be given in advance if criteria is met and this has been discussed with your healthcare team and it is clearly clarified in your medical record.

A person has a grievous and irremediable medical condition only if they meet all of the following criteria:

- they have a serious and incurable illness, disease or disability;
- they are in an advanced state of irreversible decline in capability;
- that illness, disease or disability or that state of decline causes them enduring physical or psychological suffering that is intolerable to them and that cannot be relieved under conditions that they consider acceptable; and
- their natural death has become reasonably foreseeable, taking into account all of their medical circumstances, without a prognosis necessarily having been made as to the specific length of time that they have remaining.

Who do I talk to if I am interested in exploring MedAID?

If you are suffering intolerably from a serious and incurable medical condition, you can talk to your care provider about your options for treatment and care. Your care provider will engage in a respectful discussion with compassion and kindness and without judgment. They will listen intently and provide information as you discuss your individual circumstances and needs. They will call upon the resources of an internal hospital team based upon your wishes. You may rescind your expression of interest at any time. The service is covered by the Ontario Health Insurance Plan (OHIP).

Does Bluewater Health support patients who request MedAID?

Every day, Bluewater Health is focused on the physical, emotional and spiritual needs of our patients and families as we help them in their quest to live fully, and when they are dying, to die in comfort with dignity. Dying with dignity indicates a death that occurs within the wishes set forth by the patient with respect to how they wish to be cared for at the end of life. We are committed to provide quality palliative and end-of-life care that addresses physical, emotional and spiritual needs, as well as compassionate support for suffering persons and their families. This aligns with our Mission: *We create exemplary healthcare experiences with patients and families every time.*

If we are asked to respond to a patient's request for medical assistance in dying we will:

- Clarify the patient's goals of ongoing care (e.g. pain management, palliative care, spiritual care);
- Offer resources to match the patient's needs and wishes for end-of-life care;
- Provide factual, non-judgmental information on how to access medical assistance in dying; and
- Utilize an established process to guide next steps.

What if my doctor refuses my right to MedAID?

We understand that medical assistance in dying is a highly debated issue in Canada about which people hold deep feelings and different views. Staff and physicians may express a conscientious objection in which case Bluewater Health respects their wishes to not participate in medical assistance in dying. If your care provider chooses not to be directly involved, a local physician or NP will be requested or there is also a provincial referral service that can be called for help finding another care provider who has expressed willingness to participate in medical assistance in dying.

Where can I die?

Bluewater Health participates in medical assistance in dying only at our hospitals in Sarnia and Petrolia, and only for our inpatients. We will do our best to provide a private, quiet, and respectful location to honour your wishes. If you wish to die at home, please talk to your care provider.

Does Bluewater Health have a policy on this?

Yes, the policy, *Medical Assistance in Dying*, is the document we use as an organization to help ensure we are consistently following proper practice across the organization. The policy is evidence-based and has been endorsed by our Medical Advisory Committee and Board of Directors. It is rooted in our ethical framework for decision-making. Staff and physicians also have access to our Medical Assistance in Dying Internal Resource group which supports clinicians in understanding all matters regarding medical assistance in dying.

What if I don't want to tell my family about my request for MedAID?

A Social Worker or any member of your healthcare team will talk to you about communication with your family and your wishes and arrangements to follow the procedure.

What is end-of-life care?

End-of-life care is very individualized and will be planned in partnership with you, your family and care provider to meet your needs. We support individuals making informed decisions about their end-of-life care. This includes talking with family, planning ahead when possible, and deciding when to decline or withdraw treatment to allow natural death. We have a knowledgeable and compassionate palliative team which offers many end-of-life therapies. Palliative care is the combination of active and compassionate therapies intended to comfort individuals and their support team who are facing chronic pain and/or the reality of impending death. We accept a patient's right to refuse therapies that may be recommended for you (e.g. chemotherapy or dialysis), food or hydration, or to provide consent. Death and dying may involve a variety of feelings and questions. In dealing with these feelings you may benefit from talking with family, friends, your care team or a spiritual advisor.

How do I learn more about end-of-life care or MedAID?

Please talk to your care provider who can guide your decision-making with verbal and written information.