

Medical Assistance in Dying

What is medical assistance in dying?

The Government of Canada has passed legislation allowing the assisted death of individuals by healthcare professionals. Medical assistance in dying is the act of bringing about death by the administration of medications upon request of an eligible individual.

How does Bluewater Health support patients who request medical assistance in dying?

Every day, Bluewater Health is focused on the physical, emotional and spiritual needs of patients and families to live fully, and when they are dying, to die in comfort with dignity. Dying with dignity respects how an individual wishes to be cared for at the end of life. This aligns with our Mission: *We create exemplary healthcare experiences with patients and families every time.*

How do I learn more about end-of-life care or medical assistance in dying?

Please talk to your care provider who can guide your decision-making with verbal and written information. You will be encouraged to meet with a member of our palliative care team to discuss alternative options to relieve suffering and to provide supports available for approaching death.

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.

Your team may consist of the following members:

Physicians (*this could include the doctor providing your hospital care, a palliative care physician, a psychiatrist, your family doctor/nurse practitioner or a physician who specializes in your medical condition*); Nurse; Social Worker; Spiritual Care; Patient Experience Partner; and your family (whoever you choose that to be).

What is the process for medical assistance in dying at Bluewater Health?

1. You make a request to your healthcare professional.
2. You can then make the formal request to proceed with medical assistance in dying. If you are physically unable to complete and sign the request, you can ask someone else to do it for you. A witness signature will be required if another person is signing the formal request for you at this initial request stage.
3. Your healthcare team will determine if you meet the eligibility criteria.
4. A referral is made to our palliative care specialists to discuss alternative treatment options that may be available to you.
5. Your formal application is made in writing, signed and dated by one independent witness.
6. If your doctor or nurse practitioner (NP) decides you qualify for medical assistance in dying, a second physician or nurse practitioner must complete another assessment to confirm you meet all the eligibility criteria. He or she must provide the assessment in writing to the first doctor or NP.
7. If your doctor or NP identifies your disease as reasonably foreseeable, they will discuss a plan and a date and time for this with you. If your doctor or NP identifies your disease is not reasonably foreseeable, there will be discussion with you and a 90-day reflection period from the time you sign the formal consent to the time that medical assistance in dying is provided.
8. You are advised that your request can proceed or may not meet eligibility; in that case you will be provided with information on how to get another opinion if that is your choice.
9. Throughout the process a team will work with you to help you through all steps.
10. Your request can be withdrawn at any time.

Once you have signed your consent and you are told that you are eligible for medical assistance in dying:

- Speak to your doctor or the team working with you if at any time you want to think more about your decision, look at other options or withdraw your request. The team may also stop the process at any time if they have concerns about the process.
- Your healthcare provider will discuss with you the date and time you would like this procedure completed.
- The team will discuss with you where you would like this procedure to take place.
- The team will discuss with you who you would like with you during the procedure.
- The team will discuss with you what to expect during the procedure.
- A Social Worker will talk to you about communication with your family and your wishes and arrangements to follow the procedure.

At the time of the procedure:

- The healthcare team identified to be with you, will stay with you.
- If you would like, you can have the healthcare team discuss with you and your family what to expect during the procedure.
- If you are able to understand, you will be reminded that you can withdraw your request at any time before the procedure.
- If you have indicated you would like to give advance approval for this procedure, your healthcare team will review this plan and make a decision at the time of the procedure, if you are unable to communicate with the team.
- An intravenous line will be started by a healthcare provider.
- Right before providing the medications, the doctor or NP will give you an opportunity to withdraw your request if you can communicate that with them. They will confirm your choice and if that is the plan of care that was discussed with you, they will proceed.
- The medications will be administered.

Following the procedure:

- After you have died, those present with you may stay as long as needed to support them through this process.
- Under current law, all deaths from medical assistance in Ontario must be reported by the doctor or NP to the Office of the Chief Coroner, unless otherwise ordered by a court. The Coroner's office must investigate to the extent necessary to enable the coroner to satisfy their mandated duty.
- All appropriate arrangements related to your death will be carried out as planned.

Bluewater Health has a policy for medical assistance in dying. It is available on request.