



PALLIATIVE CARE

Palliative care is holistic, person-centered care for people facing life-limiting illnesses or disabilities. It focuses on giving patients their best possible quality of life despite illness or disability. This report calls for earlier integration of palliative care for more patients, the prioritization of visitor access in palliative care, and a clear distinction between palliative care and medical assistance in dying (MAiD).

When a medical team seems to have exhausted all treatment options and a terminal diagnosis is given, a physician will too often tell a patient, “I’m sorry, there is nothing more we can do for you.” The doctor then refers the patient to hospice or palliative care, which the patient enters with the mindset that nothing can or will be done for them. But there is much that palliative care can offer to patients living with disability, debilitating illness, or facing the end of life. This care should be available to every Canadian in need of it.

Palliative care is holistic, person-centered care for adults and children facing life-limiting or life-threatening illness. As our population ages and medical treatments improve, more Canadians live longer with life-limiting illnesses, and more die of chronic conditions than from sudden causes like heart attack or accidents.¹ These people could benefit for years from the palliative approach to pain and symptom management.

Palliative care recognizes and respects

inherent human dignity. It neither hastens death nor unnaturally prolongs life. It offers physical, emotional, spiritual, and social support to give patients their best possible quality of life despite illness or disability. It also encompasses the health and well-being of caregivers and family members.

Palliative care is team-based and involves a range of services delivered by a range of professionals – physicians, nurses, home care workers, pharmacists, physiotherapists, social workers, pastors, therapists, and volunteers may all have a role in supporting a patient and their family.² Ideally, this support is available from diagnosis of a life-limiting illness through to death, is provided in a variety of settings, and extends into bereavement care for those left behind.

Knowing that medically hastened death (commonly referred to as medical assistance in dying or MAiD³) is rapidly increasing in Canada for those with a life-threatening illness or severe disability,⁴