



ASSISTED SUICIDE & EUTHANASIA



When the Supreme Court of Canada struck down the *Criminal Code* prohibitions on assisted suicide in the 2015 Carter case, it overturned years of legal, medical, and ethical precedents. Parliament responded in 2016 with Bill C-14, which amended the *Criminal Code* and established a legal framework in which doctors could prematurely end the lives of some of their dying patients on request.

In 2021, Parliament passed Bill C-7, further expanding Canada's euthanasia law to permit doctors to end the lives of patients with disabilities or chronic illnesses that are not terminal. Euthanasia eligibility will also automatically extend to those suffering from mental illness in March of 2023. Waiting periods have been decreased and witness requirements reduced. Bill C-7 weakened what were already inadequate protections for vulnerable Canadians with diseases or disabilities.

Medical Assistance in Dying (MAiD) is funded in every province and patients who are suffering have greater access to MAiD than to social supports, palliative care, or psychological counseling. Canada's system for MAiD meets none of the stringent criteria for minimizing risks that the courts initially envisioned. Predictably, Canada has seen a major increase in MAiD deaths each year, with more than 20,000 Canadians having now died by MAiD.

The foundational ethic of Western law and human rights cares for – and does not kill – the weak, sick, disabled, and elderly. Yet Bill C-7 created an ableist system that causes a value divide between able-bodied Canadians (who are offered suicide prevention) and disabled Canadians (who are offered suicide assistance).

This legal shift has cultural impacts, including the normalization of suicide as a viable, socially acceptable way to address suffering. Social contagion, copycat, and coupling effects, which are well documented in relation to suicide, will be reflected in MAiD death rates as well.

ARPA Canada believes that Canada should support suicide prevention for everyone at any stage of life. Anything else requires value judgements about the worth of another's life – judgments that no human being should be making. The recommendations in this report focus on amending Canada's euthanasia law to ensure vulnerable people receive the full protection of the Criminal law and that ableism and ageism are eliminated from public policy.

For more information about this topic, please refer to our related policy report document. This report can be found on our website at ARPACanada.ca/publication/assisted-suicide-and-euthanasia-updated-fall-2021/.