



Catholic Health  
Sponsors of Ontario

## **Catholic Health Sponsors of Ontario Response to Physician Assisted Death**

Catholic health care organizations have been an integral and essential dimension of the delivery of health care in Canada well before it became a country and in what is now the province of Ontario. A universally recognized characteristic of these organizations has been their mission and commitment to the most vulnerable members of Canadian society. Catholic hospitals and our other health care organizations have consistently witnessed to the value of the human person as a gift from God from the beginning of life until natural death. This is the foundation of our commitment to provide the best palliative and end-of-life care possible. It is also why we reject any medical procedures that would intentionally terminate a human life.

In February 2015, the Supreme Court of Canada declared invalid the prohibition on physician assisted death. The Court has given Parliament and the provincial governments one year to respond by developing the necessary legislative frameworks in which physician assisted death could be legally practised.

In keeping with our mission and values, Catholic Health Sponsors of Ontario and its health care organizations are committed to assist each dying person and their loved ones to:

- Make informed and conscientious decisions about their end of life care;
- Decide when to refuse or withdraw life-sustaining interventions when the burdens resulting from such medical treatment are clearly disproportionate to the benefits hoped for;
- Receive effective pain and symptom management to lessen pain and suffering;
- Have access to high-quality palliative and hospice care that encompasses support for the physical, spiritual, emotional and psychological dimensions of the end-of-life experience for the dying person and their family.

The Supreme Court ruling to allow physician assisted death is morally incompatible with the mission and values of our Catholic health providers and is soon regrettably to become a legal reality. Should a request for physician assisted death occur in our organizations we will not abandon the person in our care. We believe that supporting those patients who are vulnerable with a non-judgemental, non-coercive approach will assist them to question their request for assisted death and to explore other alternative forms of medical care. This is completely

consistent with our moral and ethical tradition. We will not provide the medical service of physician assisted death in our institutions nor will we directly or explicitly refer a patient to receive this same medical procedure.

Therefore in keeping with the mission and values of Catholic health care we will not abandon the integrity of our clinicians and our institutions. We will protect the conscience rights of our staff members and physicians not to place any vulnerable person at risk. Catholic health care will stay engaged with the patient and support the process of informed consent by continuing to apply the guidelines provided in the Catholic Health Alliance of Canada's *Health Ethics Guide*.

Catholic Health Sponsors of Ontario, representing their health care providers in Ontario, wish to insist that any regulations adopted as a result of the ruling of the Supreme Court of Canada must:

1. Allow for, encourage, and promote the best palliative care possible for patients who require end of life care.
2. Respect the *Local Health System Integration Act* (2006), ensuring that a religious organization is not required to provide a service that is contrary to its mission and values and that the rights of conscience for those individuals who work in our health care organizations will be respected.
3. Include a protocol for safe transfer of care when a person, after receiving relevant information to support the process of informed consent, chooses to receive care elsewhere.

Considering our ethical principles, mission and values, Catholic health organizations across Canada are working together to provide common policy approaches that will ultimately minimize the harm to vulnerable individuals and society in the face of physician assisted death.

Every day in Catholic health care organizations across the province, our physicians and staff provide outstanding compassionate care to people at the end of life. We are confident we will find a way to respond respectfully and compassionately to requests for physician assisted death that does not abandon the person in our care nor compromise the values of our providers or organizations.

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