

NDP Response: Physician-Assisted Dying

New Democrats recognize that there are profound and highly complex medical, ethical and legal implications involved in the care of terminally ill patients – and that physician-assisted dying engenders strong feelings, touching many Canadians in a very personal way.

If elected, Canadians can trust an NDP government under Tom Mulcair to make access to palliative care a priority, while taking immediate steps to implement the Supreme Court of Canada's historic and unanimous Carter decision swiftly with balance, respect and sensitivity.

New Democrats have been clear that any discussion of physician-assisted death must include a broader conversation about end of life care. Families are struggling to care for those living in constant pain and they need proper resources and support. NDP MP Charlie Angus proposed in June 2014 a motion, supported unanimously by all parties in the House of Commons, calling for a pan-Canadian strategy for palliative and end-of-life care. This motion has moved our conversation forward at the national level, and we look forward to continuing to work with Canadians to make sure better services and supports are available during these difficult times.

Since the Carter decision, the NDP has called on the Conservative government to implement without delay the letter and the spirit of the ruling. We were dismayed that, despite being given a full year by the Court to update Canada's laws, for the first five months Conservatives took no action, either in Parliament or in consultation with opposition parties. Just prior to making an early election call, the Conservatives hastily announced a flawed consultation process, scuppering any hope of finding consensus or common ground in the short term.

Furthermore, two of the three people chosen to lead the announced consultation served as government witnesses, arguing that physician-assisted death should remain illegal. These nominations raise concerns that the Conservatives do not accept the Court's ruling and hope to block its implementation. New Democrats will watch this process closely. We expect Conservatives, and the individuals they have appointed to their panel, to act in good faith and recognize that the Court's decision is final.

Following the election, an NDP government would draw from the highly-effective, consensual and broadly supported process undertaken by the Quebec government. Parliament needs to hear from all Canadians, particularly members of the disabled community, the provinces, territories and Aboriginal governments, medical professionals and experts in law and ethics, to ensure that rights and safeguards are applied equally across Canada. We need to protect the vulnerable without creating unreasonable barriers for individuals seeking access to dying with dignity.

Canadians hold strong and divergent views on these important issues. New Democrats are no different in that regard. Those views must be heard and taken into account as we seek a way forward.