

DWDC Letter-Writing Toolkit: Voice Your Choice to the Council of Canadian Academies

Dying With Dignity Canada (DWDC) has crafted a toolkit to help supporters influence the ongoing federal studies on the future of assisted dying in Canada.

As you may know, the Trudeau government has tapped the Council of Canadian Academies to look into the possibility of extending access to assisted dying to three groups of suffering individuals whose right to choice was curtailed with the passage of Bill C-14. These groups include:

- Desperately ill individuals who will continue to be excluded unless the law is changed to allow for advance requests for medical assistance in dying (MAID);
- Individuals whose primary medical condition is a mental illness; and
- Mature minors.

The CCA has put out a call for input to “groups and organizations affected by, or involved in MAID.” Of course, Dying With Dignity Canada will be making an official submission. Our focus will be on how the current ban on advance requests for assisted dying affects Canadians facing a diagnosis for conditions, such as dementia, that rob their victims of mental capacity as a matter of course. Our supporters have made it clear that this is an issue that is of the utmost importance to them. In addition, eight in 10 Canadians support allowing individuals diagnosed with a severe, irremediable medical condition to, while they are still competent, make a request for assisted dying that could be honoured after they have lost mental capacity.

Because the CCA has decided not to hold broad public consultations, we have taken it upon ourselves to make sure the voices and personal stories of ordinary Canadians aren't left out of the studies. We are inviting Canadians to send us letters that we can include as part of our official submission to the CCA. Your testimony will help us create a body of evidence that shows how the ban on advance requests for assisted dying unfairly limits choice for Canadians, especially those who are living with a dementia diagnosis and want to exercise their right to a peaceful death.

The toolkit includes suggestions on how you might want to structure your letter, including prompts to help you get started. You may wish to focus on one of the subject areas exclusively or touch upon all three (advance requests, mental illness, and mature minors) — whatever makes most sense for you. **Please note that we will not include letters that contain hateful or abusive language as part of our official submission.**

How to submit your letter

Send your completed letters to us by email at consultation@dyingwithdignity.ca or by post to Suite 802, 55 Eglinton Ave. E, Toronto, Ontario, M4P 1G8. **We will be accepting submissions until Sept. 15, 2017, so please make sure you leave enough time for your letter to arrive to our head office.**

Writing Your Letter

Salutation

To the Council of Canadian Academies' Expert Panel on Medical Assistance in Dying in Canada:

Executive Summary:

Briefly summarize your key observations or concerns, using two or three bullet points or a short introductory paragraph. Sample prompts include:

- *“When examining the future of medically assisted dying in Canada, the Expert Panel must consider...”*
- *“The eligibility criteria laid out in Canada’s assisted dying law are discriminatory because...”*
- *“The ban on advance requests for medical assistance in dying is harmful because...”*

Body of Your Letter:

In clear, concise language, outline the evidence you believe the CCA Expert Panel should consider when examining the future of assisted dying in Canada. Because the CCA is looking for evidence, and not policy recommendations, **be specific about how the current rules for assisted dying affect you or someone you know.**

What personal experiences or perspectives might count as evidence? Really, it’s up to you. Example of points you may wish to touch upon in your written testimony could include:

- How a family member or friend died in a state of intense suffering because he or she was denied the right to make an advance request for assisted dying;
- How the ban on advance requests for assisted dying/access for individuals with severe mental illness/access for mature minors led a loved one to end their own life unnecessarily early or in a manner they would otherwise have sought to avoid;
- How you may be denied your right to a peaceful death unless Canada’s assisted dying rules are changed to allow advance requests for assisted dying/access for individuals with severe mental illness/access for mature minors;
- How a loved one who was found to be eligible for assisted dying was ultimately denied their choice because they lost capacity before assisted dying could be provided; and/or
- How a change in policy on advance requests for assisted dying/access for individuals with severe mental illness/access for mature minors would affect you or someone you care about.

Please note that the government has asked the CCA working groups not to include recommendations for legislation as part of their final reports to Parliament. However, please feel free to include policy recommendations if you feel inclined to do so.

Your Conclusion

Briefly summarize the main points of your letter. In a sentence or short paragraph, reiterate the main points you made in the executive summary.

Finish your letter by thanking the CCA panelists for their consideration. You may also wish to remind them that the voices, experiences and rights of ordinary Canadians must be at the heart of any serious examination of the future of assisted dying in this country.

Sincerely,

[Your name]