

Questions and Answers (Public)
Medical Assistance in Dying
June 6, 2016

1. What is Medical Assistance in Dying?

Medical Assistance in Dying occurs when a physician provides or administers a lethal dose of drugs to intentionally cause the death of a competent adult, at the adult's request. In 2015, the Supreme Court of Canada struck down the current law that makes it a criminal offence for a physician to assist a patient in dying in certain circumstances.

2. Who will be eligible for Medical Assistance in Dying?

As of June 6, 2016 and until federal legislation is in place, patients with grievous and irremediable medical conditions, which cause enduring suffering that is intolerable to the individual in the circumstances of his or her condition, can approach physicians to inquire about whether they qualify for medical assistance in dying.

New federal legislation was recently introduced on Medical Assistance in Dying and is currently being debated.

If the [federal legislation Bill C-14](#) is passed, an individual would need to meet the following criteria to be considered eligible for medical assistance in dying:

- competent adult (18 or over) with an incurable illness in an advanced state of irreversible decline;
- individual is experiencing intolerable suffering; and
- death is reasonably foreseeable.

People with mental health conditions as the only underlying medical condition and mature minors are not eligible under the legislation.

An individual seeking Medical Assistance in Dying must clearly provide informed, expressed, written, and voluntary consent to the termination of life. Informed consent means that a patient understands the nature, benefit, risks, alternatives and consequences of a health care decision. It also means the patient has had all of their questions sufficiently answered.

3. What is the status of legislation on Medical Assistance in Dying?

The proposed federal legislation is still being considered by the federal government and the Senate.

As of June 6, 2016 and until federal legislation is in place, patients with grievous and irremediable medical conditions can approach physicians to inquire about whether they qualify for medical assistance in dying. Physicians willing to provide the service will follow the policy of the College of Physicians and Surgeons of Saskatchewan applicable to the service. The policy requires the attending physician and another consulting physician to assess whether the patient's medical condition meets the criteria set by the Supreme Court of Canada and whether the patient meets the capacity requirement to give consent.

4. What is happening in Saskatchewan on this issue?

The Ministries of Justice and Health are following developments around the federal bill, connecting with provincial health system stakeholders and partners. Work is underway on standard provincial processes. However, the patient's circumstances would likely determine the process to some extent. In general, the patient's eligibility would be determined and then confirmed by a second practitioner, the patient would provide the required consents, and logistical arrangements would then be considered.

5. How would a patient get more information or request Medical Assistance in Dying?

Patients are advised to have a discussion with their physician or another physician of their choice.

6. What happens if a patient's physician doesn't provide the service?

Not all physicians will be able to offer this service or will choose to do so. However, they will continue to provide other medically required care, and ensure the patient has access to information on end-of-life care options and access to information for Medical Assistance in Dying if that is their wish.

7. Where is additional support and information available?

The College of Physicians and Surgeons of Saskatchewan can provide details about processes and physician guidelines. Health providers can contact their professional regulatory bodies for information specific to their areas of practice.