

MEDICAL ASSISTANCE IN DYING

Information for Patients

GETTING THE RIGHT HELP

Death and dying can be difficult subjects to think and talk about. If you are thinking about medical assistance in dying, talk to someone who can help inform you about your potential options: a doctor, nurse practitioner or other health care provider. You can also speak with your family, friends or a spiritual advisor. If your suffering continues and you want to consider a formal request for medical assistance in dying you will need to speak with your doctor or nurse practitioner.

YOUR DOCTOR OR NURSE PRACTITIONER CAN GUIDE YOU THROUGH THE PROCESS

Your doctor or nurse practitioner can discuss your medical condition with you – your diagnosis and prognosis, and all the appropriate care options available. These may include different medical treatments, palliative care, psychological support, spiritual care and/or medical assistance in dying.

If you need help to understand the options – such as an interpreter or another kind of assistance – your doctor or nurse practitioner must take all necessary steps to ensure you can understand the information and can communicate your decision.

Some doctors or nurse practitioners may not want to provide medical assistance in dying. They may choose not to provide the service. However, in Ontario, it is their professional duty to refer you to a doctor or nurse practitioner who is available to assess you for medical assistance in dying. A care coordination service is available to clinicians, patients, caregivers and families looking for information and help to facilitate access to medical assistance in dying.

A REQUEST FOR MEDICAL ASSISTANCE IN DYING MUST BE IN WRITING

Your doctor or nurse practitioner can provide you with a Patient Request form, available [here](#), to complete. If you are physically unable to complete and sign the request, you can ask someone else to do it for you.

Your written request must be signed and dated after you are told by your doctor or nurse practitioner that you have a grievous and irremediable medical condition. You can withdraw your request at any time.

Your request must be signed and dated with two independent witnesses present. Other eligibility criteria for medical assistance in dying are listed in the federal legislation, available [here](#).

Important to know:

- You must personally consent to medical assistance in dying. Another person, often called a substitute decision maker, cannot consent to medical assistance in dying on your behalf, or make the request for you.
- You cannot give consent in advance. You must be able to provide consent until the moment you receive medical assistance in dying.
- You can withdraw your request at any time.
- Even if you make the request, you can still receive all the other types of health care you need from your doctor or nurse practitioner.

WHETHER YOU'RE ELIGIBLE DEPENDS ON SPECIFIC REQUIREMENTS

Once you make your request, your doctor or nurse practitioner will assess whether you are eligible to receive medical assistance in dying. Your eligibility depends on a number of conditions required by federal law.

WHO IS ELIGIBLE FOR MEDICAL ASSISTANCE IN DYING?

Here are some of the legal requirements set out in federal legislation that must be met. This is not intended to be exhaustive. Additional requirements are listed in the federal legislation, available [here](#).

To receive medical assistance in dying, a patient must:

- Be eligible for publicly funded health care services in Canada
- Be 18 years of age or older
- Be capable of making health care decisions, and
- Have a grievous and irremediable medical condition, which means the patient:
 - Has a serious and incurable illness, disease or disability, and
 - Is in an advanced state of irreversible decline in capability, and
 - Is enduring physical or psychological suffering, caused by the medical condition or the state of decline, that is intolerable to the person, and
 - Natural death has become reasonably foreseeable.

Your doctor or nurse practitioner will make sure that you are making your request voluntarily and that you are providing informed consent. Your doctor or nurse practitioner will discuss the options available to relieve your suffering, including palliative care, before you provide informed consent to medical assistance in dying.

A SECOND ASSESSMENT IS REQUIRED

If your doctor or nurse practitioner decides that you qualify for medical assistance in dying, a second doctor or nurse practitioner must complete another assessment to confirm that you meet all the eligibility criteria. They must provide the assessment in writing to the first doctor or nurse practitioner.

YOU HAVE TIME TO THINK ABOUT YOUR DECISION

At least 10 days must pass before assistance in dying is provided, starting from when you signed the written request, to give you time to think about your decision. In some cases, the doctors or nurse practitioners may approve a shorter waiting period. You may also withdraw your request at any time.

WHAT IS THE SERVICE ITSELF?

Once the waiting period has passed, the doctor or nurse practitioner will either give you the drugs, or will write a prescription for you to fill on your own. This means you take the drugs yourself in a setting of your choice. How you receive the drugs is your choice.

Right before providing the drugs or giving you the prescription, your doctor or nurse practitioner will give you an opportunity to withdraw your request, will confirm they find that you are still medically capable of making this choice, and will get your final consent to proceed.

HOW TO GET HELP IN FINDING A DOCTOR OR NURSE PRACTITIONER TO PROVIDE MEDICAL ASSISTANCE IN DYING

If you do not have access to a doctor or nurse practitioner willing to provide medical assistance in dying, you (or a family member or caregiver) can request a referral for medical assistance in dying through a care coordination service which can be reached toll-free at: 1-866-286-4023.

The care coordination service is available Monday to Friday 9am – 5pm EST in English and French (translations for other languages can also be requested). TTY services are also available at: 1- 844-953-3350. Starting September 1st, 2017 information resources will be available 24/7.

You can also contact the care coordination service for additional information and questions regarding end-of-life care in Ontario, including palliative care resources.

WHAT WILL BE DONE AFTER I DIE?

Under current law, all medically assisted deaths in Ontario must be reported by the doctor or nurse practitioner to the Office of the Chief Coroner. While the Coroner must be notified of all medically assisted deaths, an investigation is not required unless the Coroner deems one to be necessary.

Patients who choose to take the prescribed drugs on their own are encouraged to share their plans and the contact information of their doctor or nurse practitioner with family or friends, or in writing somewhere easily located. This will help ensure authorities are aware the death was planned.

Patients should make sure that they or their family can provide all the information and documentation that the doctor, nurse practitioner or coroner may require.

OTHER SOURCES FOR HELP AND HEALTH INFORMATION

If you feel an urgent need for assistance, consider the following resources, **available 24 hours a day/7 days a week**:

- Get free medical advice through Telehealth Ontario at **1-866-797-0000**, **TTY 1-866-797-0007**
- If you have a medical emergency or require immediate attention, call **9-1-1**
- If you are experiencing distress or a crisis, there are support lines in many cities across Ontario. A list of phone numbers is available at: **<http://www.dcontario.org/centres.html>**
- If you need assistance or services to address a mental health issue, call Ontario's Mental Health Helpline at **1-866-531-2600**
- If you need information about community, social, non-clinical health and related government services in Ontario, dial **2-1-1**