

For immediate release

Physician-Assisted Death* Bill C-14 Response

April 18, 2016

Calgary, AB – The Federal Government has just released Bill C-14, medical assistance in dying. As debate begins in the House of Commons, the Centre for Suicide Prevention (CSP) urges our elected officials to make a clear distinction between physician-assisted death (PAD) and suicide. Though often used interchangeably, these are two different issues that affect two distinct groups of people. Mara Grunau, Executive Director at CSP, believes that it would be disastrous if, by attempting to help Canadians seeking physician-assisted death, Canadians experiencing suicidality are further stigmatized. “Distinguishing between these two populations with clarity of language is paramount,” says Grunau. “We want Canadians to understand the differences between these two issues so that the vocal minority, those seeking PAD, do not further eclipse the silent, thousands of Canadians in suicidal crisis each year,” emphasized Grunau. “Far more people die by suicide than by PAD yet PAD deaths are more widely covered in the media.” In Washington state, for example, there is 1 PAD death for every 7 suicide deaths.

Another distinction Grunau provided was that the vast majority of people who are suicidal do not want to die, they want the pain of living to end. “When they are at a point of suicidal crisis, they cannot see alternatives to their situation beyond death. Given help, they will choose help,” says Grunau. She also explains that suicidality is temporary, as “People can be at immediate risk of suicide, then not, then experience a suicide crisis again. Others may only have one suicidal experience in their lifetime.” Grunau emphasizes that with appropriate mental health care, recovery for people who have experienced suicidality is possible, they can go on to live mentally healthy lives. Grunau says that for those with chronic suicidality, they can learn how to live with their suicidality, often with the support of others around them.

As part of the implementation of medical assistance in death legislation, CSP urges the Government of Canada to educate Canadians about the distinction between these two groups to help protect those people experiencing suicidality. “People experiencing suicidality often do not seek help even though they want it. If death becomes a normalized option, Canadians may become less knowledgeable, sensitive and likely to help those in need,” says Grunau. However, “the Centre for Suicide Prevention does not have a formal stance on the PAD legislation, as it is beyond the scope of our work.”

*Medical Assistance in Dying (MAID) is the terminology recommended by the joint parliamentary committee on physician-assisted dying.

Further information:

[Infographic: What is the difference between Suicide and Physician-Assisted Death?](#) by Centre for Suicide Prevention

[“‘Suicide’ or ‘self-death,’”](#) blog by Dr. Michael Trew past Chief Addictions and Mental Health Officer for the Province of Alberta

Contact: Crystal Walker, Communications Coordinator - crystal@suicideinfo.ca or (403) 245-3900 ext. 229