



Hi All,

You may know that Canada is now considering allowing access to Medical Assistance in Dying (MAiD) to people with mental illnesses. At the same time, we know that too few people have access to the essential treatments that could make living with severe mental illnesses much more manageable.

Dr. Randall White has given permission to share the letter below that he has written explaining the current situation. If you want to contact your political leaders about your opinion you may want to make use of his comments like this summary of the current inadequate access to treatments:

"Canadians with severe and refractory mental disorders do not all have quick access to psychiatric consultation. Even if they have, they may not have access to the most appropriate treatments. For instance, rTMS and ketamine are not offered in the public health system in BC. In many smaller communities, ECT is not available or requires a wait, especially for outpatient treatment. And clozapine is underutilized. Many people cannot afford private evidence-based psychotherapy. Furthermore, our most marginalized patients may lack stable housing and evidence-based substance-use treatment. How can we consider offering patients access to physician-assisted death when they may not have access to the treatments and support that could alleviate their suffering?"

Susan

***Sent on behalf of Dr Randall White, WCDB President***

Dear Members of the Western Canada District Branch APA,

**Re: Action Alert on Bill C-7 on Medical Assistance in Dying**

The Senate approved five amendments to bill C-7 on Medical Assistance in Dying, including one that would place an 18-month time limit on the proposed ban on MAiD for people whose sole condition is mental illness. Others include a provision to allow advanced requests, including for those who have progressive dementia, as well as the collection of race-based data on who requests and receives MAiD.

The bill is now in the House of Commons, which will have to accept or reject the amendments. The government is supposed to pass the legislation by February 26, 2021, but has already obtained several extensions to the original deadline set by a Quebec court.

Disability advocates in Canada and beyond have expressed their concern about the expansion of MAiD to non-terminally ill people. The United Nations issued a commentary on Bill C-7 only weeks ago sounding an alarm on the human rights implications of this legislation. You can find that here: <https://spcommreports.ohchr.org/TMResultsBase/DownloadPublicCommunicationFile?gld=26002>

In December 2016, the American Psychiatric Association issued a position statement on medical euthanasia which states that “a psychiatrist should not prescribe or administer any intervention to a non-terminally ill person for the purpose of causing death.” In Canada, physicians can opt out of participation in MAiD although in many provinces we are expected to provide patients with guidance on where to obtain it. Whether the Senate proposal to allow MAiD for the mentally ill would require us to violate the APA policy is ambiguous, but the clear intent of the APA is to stake out the ethical ground in opposition to physician assisted suicide in psychiatry.

Canadians with severe and refractory mental disorders do not all have quick access to psychiatric consultation. Even if they have, they may not have access to the most appropriate treatments. For instance, rTMS and ketamine are not offered in the public health system in BC. In many smaller communities, ECT is not available or requires a wait, especially for outpatient treatment. And clozapine is underutilized. Many people cannot afford private evidence-based psychotherapy. Furthermore, our most marginalized patients may lack stable housing and evidence-based substance-use treatment. How can we consider offering patients access to physician-assisted death when they may not have access to the treatments and support that could alleviate their suffering?

I urge you to communicate as soon as possible about this with your Member of Parliament. [Find Members of Parliament - Members of Parliament - House of Commons of Canada \(ourcommons.ca\)](https://ourcommons.ca)

and with Prime Minister Trudeau. [Contact the Prime Minister | Prime Minister of Canada \(pm.gc.ca\)](https://pm.gc.ca)

Sincerely,

**Randall F. White, MD, FRCPC, DFAPA**  
President, Western Canada District Branch APA  
Clinical Professor, UBC Department of Psychiatry



WESTERN CANADA  
DISTRICT BRANCH of the  
AMERICAN **PSYCHIATRIC** ASSOCIATION