Canadian Conference of Catholic Bishops

Advance Requests for Euthanasia

What Catholics Need to Know About Bill C-41

What our faith asks of us

Every person possesses dignity simply by being a unique person created in the image and likeness of God. Illness, memory loss, and dependence do not diminish it. The Church opposes euthanasia and assisted suicide. Following Christ and a long Christian tradition of care, we are called to accompany people who are sick, frail, or marginalized. Caring for a person can never include deliberately ending their life.

Mental illness exclusion and advance requests for euthanasia

Canadian law calls euthanasia and assisted suicide "medical assistance in dying" (MAID).

Canadians have reason to be worried about Bill C-41, the *Medical Assistance in Dying Safeguards Act*. The bill would keep the exclusion where mental illness is a person's only underlying medical condition. That is welcome. But it would also allow euthanasia through advance requests after a person can no longer understand or reconsider their decision.

Unless Parliament acts, euthanasia for mental illness alone will become legal on 17 March 2027. Bill C-41 would prevent this expansion, as a parliamentary committee recommended after extensive consultation with experts and those affected. But the same bill would also allow advance requests for euthanasia—a separate expansion with no corresponding deadline and so far without the same sustained, wide-ranging federal scrutiny.

Parliament should separate the two measures. The urgency of preventing one expansion must not become a reason to rush another.

Canadian Conference of Catholic Bishops
2500 Don Reid Drive
Ottawa, ON K1H 2J2

www.cccb.ca

How advance requests for euthanasia would work

Under Bill C-41, an advance request would involve two stages:

1. A person with a serious, incurable illness expected to cause loss of decision-making capacity, such as Alzheimer's disease, signs a request while still able to make informed decisions. It describes the circumstances in which they would want euthanasia after losing that capacity.
2. Euthanasia could take place years later. The person would no longer be able to reconsider the request in light of their actual experience.

Other reasons why advance requests for euthanasia should be rejected

Some people support advance requests because they fear future dependence. Yet research and clinical experience show that memory loss or dependence does not necessarily mean that a person finds their life unbearable. What someone fears beforehand may differ from how they experience life with illness.

An earlier request is not the same as informed consent at the time euthanasia takes place. Doctors and nurse practitioners would have to assess suffering and interpret the request and the person's responses. Families and caregivers may be asked to help determine whether the conditions for ending their loved one's life have been met. An earlier request can never make deliberately ending a person's life morally acceptable.

Fundamental objections cannot be resolved by safeguards

The proposed expansion of euthanasia for mental illness alone underwent sustained expert and parliamentary reviews. The legalization of advance requests has not undergone the same level of detailed federal review. People facing loss of decision-making capacity deserve equally careful attention to their safety and well-being.

Advance requests would not be limited to people near death. They would allow euthanasia when the person is not at the end of life and can no longer make an informed choice. Parliament must confront the reasons for rejecting this expansion, rather than assume safeguards can make it acceptable.

In 2025, the UN Committee on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities urged Canada not to expand euthanasia through advance requests.

What this means in Quebec

Euthanasia following an advance request already takes place in Quebec under provincial law. Quebec's prosecution service has a policy against criminal prosecution when specified conditions are met. Bill C-41 would expressly change federal criminal law to permit this practice. Catholics in Quebec should also speak out. Anyone who has witnessed problems can share their concerns with their MP while respecting patients' privacy.

Refusing overly burdensome treatment

The Church teaches that a person may refuse treatment when its burdens are disproportionate to its expected benefits. The intention must be to forgo that treatment, not to cause death. An advance directive refusing such treatment is not an advance request for euthanasia. Ordinary care remains due, including food and fluids while these remain beneficial and do not impose excessive burdens on the patient.

Care that people can count on

The response to fear and suffering must be care and accompaniment:

- Appropriate treatment, including geriatric care for older people's health needs.
- Help at home, suitable housing, and practical support and respite for caregivers.
- Palliative care provided as soon as it is needed, rather than only in the final weeks of life, to relieve pain and other forms of suffering and to address the emotional, social, and spiritual needs of those who are ill or dying.

Families and parishes can offer companionship and spiritual support. No one should be made to feel that dependence makes them a burden or their life less worthy of protection.



Further reading:

cccb.ca/billc41

What you can do now

- **Pray** for people who are ill, those who care for them, and for an end to euthanasia in our country. Consider fasting as your health permits.

- **Share this fact sheet** and encourage respectful discussion in your parish and community.

- **Make your voice heard—write to your Member of Parliament.**

  Join the CCCB's letter-writing campaign to ask your MP to:

  - Keep the mental-illness exclusion in place through separate legislation.
  - Remove the advance-request provisions from Bill C-41.

Personalize and send your letter using the CCCB template.

- **Help build a community in which people can count on one another.**

  Visit people who are sick or frail, and support their caregivers. These works of mercy bear witness to Christ's love and affirm that everyone deserves care and companionship until natural death.

The Canadian Conference of Catholic Bishops (CCCB) brings together Canada's Catholic bishops to address matters of shared pastoral concern and contribute to public life in the light of the Gospel.

Learn more
www.cccb.ca

Contact
communications@cccb.ca

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