Medical Assistance in Dying
FAQs for Patients and Families

What is “Medical Assistance in Dying”? 

The term Medical Assistance in Dying, describes:

- the administering by a physician or nurse practitioner of a substance to a person, at their request, that causes their death; or
- the prescribing or providing by a physician or nurse practitioner of a substance to a person at their request, so that they may self-administer the substance and in doing so cause their own death.

Is Medical Assistance in Dying Legal? 

As of June 17, 2016, it is legal for a doctor to provide medical assistance in dying for individuals who meet pre-defined eligibility criteria.

Who is eligible for Medical Assistance in Dying? 

A person may have medical assistance in dying if they meet all the following criteria:

- Possess a provincial health card
- At least 18 years of age
- Capable of making decisions with respect to their health
- Have a grievous and irremediable medical condition (see below)
- Have made a voluntary request for medical assistance in dying that, in particular, was not made as a result of external pressure, and
- Give informed consent to receive medical assistance in dying after having been informed of the means that are available to relieve their suffering, including palliative care.

1 Waterloo Wellington LHIN would like to acknowledge Sinai Health System for developing content used in this document. It has been adapted by the WWLHIN and most recently updated in September 2017.
What does “capable” mean?
A capable person has decision making capacity. You are able to:

- Understand the information that is relevant to making a decision about your health, and
- Appreciate the reasonably foreseeable consequences of a decision or lack of decision.

Your health care team assesses capacity by asking you questions.

What does grievous and irremediable medical condition mean?
A person has a grievous and irremediable medical condition if:

- they have a serious and incurable illness, disease or disability;
- they are in an advanced state of irreversible decline in capability;
- that illness, disease or disability or that state of decline causes them enduring physical or psychological suffering that is intolerable to them and that cannot be relieved under conditions that they consider acceptable; and
- their natural death has become reasonably foreseeable, taking into account all of their medical circumstances, without a prognosis necessarily having been made as to the specific length of time that they have remaining.

What is enduring suffering?
Enduring suffering is physical or psychological pain or distress that you have lived with for a long time.

What is intolerable suffering?
Intolerable suffering is physical or psychological pain or distress that you find unbearable.

What does it mean to give informed consent?
Before you request assistance in dying, you need to know about the options available to relieve suffering, including palliative care. Your health care team wants to make sure you have all the information you need to make this important decision. Your team also wants to be certain that you are making this decision voluntarily -- that you are not being forced into it by someone.

Your consent is given in writing. This shows you are sure about your request.
How Do I Access Medical Assistance in Dying?

If you are suffering from a grievous and irremediable medical condition, you can talk to your doctor or nurse practitioner about your options for treatment and care. These options may now include medical assistance in dying. If you’re already in a hospital or long-term care home, speak to your doctor or care provider about your options.

What if my family physician doesn't support my decision for Medical Assistance in Dying?

Some doctors or nurse practitioners may choose not to provide Medical Assistance in Dying. However, in Ontario, it is their professional duty to refer you to another doctor or nurse practitioner who is available and willing to assess your eligibility for this service.

Physicians and nurse practitioners cannot impede or cause delays in you accessing Medical Assistance in Dying, even if it conflicts with their personal, moral or religious beliefs.²

What if I do not have a doctor?

In Waterloo Wellington, you can also access information about MAID and/or receive a referral to providers who can support your request for MAID by calling 310-2222 or the provincial MAID Care Coordination Service @ 1-866-286-4023.

If you do not have a family doctor for ongoing support, you can contact:

Health Care Connect
Phone: 519-883-5521
Fax: 519-623-5068

Patient Registration: 1-800-445-1822
Monday – Friday 9:00 a.m. – 5:00 p.m.

www.ontario.ca/healthcareconnect

² http://www.cpso.on.ca/Policies-Publications/Policy/Medical-Assistance-in-Dying
Is there a waiting period?
Yes. Under normal circumstances there must be 10 days between the day you sign the request and the day you receive assistance in dying. (This may be reduced if both health care providers agree that death or loss of capacity to consent is imminent.) Please ask your team for details on how this affects you.  

How is assistance in dying different from stopping or not starting treatment?
Patients choose when to stop treatment or when not to start treatment. These decisions, like assisted dying, are the personal decisions of each patient. Patients base these decisions on their values, beliefs and health care goals.

The key difference is the intent of the decision. Patients who choose to stop treatment or not to start treatment intend to avoid treatment that will not provide a benefit or that is too difficult. Their intent is not necessarily to bring about their own death. If death happens, the cause of death will be their disease.

With assistance in dying, the patient’s death is intended. The cause of death is the medication given to the patient.

How are Palliative Care and Medical Assistance in Dying Related?
Medical assistance in dying does not change how Ontario patients with life-limiting illness access other medical treatments, including palliative care. Based on the experience of other countries, only a small number of Ontarians will choose to access medical assistance in dying. Patients who request information about or who pursue medical assistance in dying will still receive palliative care and other treatments in accordance with their goals of care.

---
4 Palliative care is an approach that improves the quality of life of patients and their families facing the problem associated with life-threatening illness, through the prevention and relief of suffering by means of early identification and impeccable assessment and treatment of pain and other problems, physical, psychosocial and spiritual. (http://www.who.int/cancer/palliative/definition/en/)
Is assistance in dying the same as assisted suicide?
They are similar. Assistance in dying includes both patient administered and physician administered methods. In the past, the patient administered method was called assisted suicide.

Do I have to undergo treatment first?
No, you do not have to undergo any treatment (e.g., chemotherapy, surgery) you find unacceptable. The Supreme Court wrote that irremediable: “… does not require the patient to undertake treatments that are not acceptable to the individual.”

Does a physician/Nurse Practitioner have to agree I meet the criteria?
Yes. You will be assessed by two (2) or more physicians/nurse practitioners. They will have to agree that you meet the criteria. If one or more physicians/nurse practitioner feels you do not meet the criteria, you can ask to be assessed by another physician/nurse practitioner. There is no requirement for the physician or Nurse Practitioner to be your primary care practitioner.

Is there a right decision?
If you meet the criteria, this is a personal decision based on your values, beliefs and health care goals. You determine what is right or wrong for you.

Can I expect my health care team to provide assistance in dying?
This varies. Some health care professionals will not be willing to help with assisted dying because it is not comfortable for them. It is a very personal choice for them, too. If they cannot help, they must follow professional requirements set by the College of Physicians and Surgeons of Ontario and the College of Nurses of Ontario. In this situation, your doctor or nurse practitioner will refer you to another practitioner to assess your eligibility for MAID and to provide MAID, if you are eligible.

---

5 http://www.cpso.on.ca/Policies-Publications/Policy/Medical-Assistance-in-Dying
Do I have to inform my family?
It is usually a good idea to try to involve your family - getting medical assistance in dying may have major impact on them. If it is difficult to talk with your family for any reason, you can ask for help from your health care team (e.g., social workers, spiritual care providers, occupational therapists, or others).

How long will the assessment take?
It depends how much time the physicians/nurse practitioners need to make sure that you meet the criteria. Please speak to your health care team if you have concerns.

Where can I have Assistance in Dying?
You can ask to receive medical assistance in dying no matter where you live or receive care, however some facilities may choose not to provide medical assistance in dying or have limitations on how they provide it. Facilities are encouraged to make this information available, so you know your options.

Can family provide assistance in dying?
Family can help you to complete forms and by providing support during the process. Family can’t administer the medication. This must be done by the patient or physician.

What is the Cost to Receive Medical Assistance in Dying?
This service is covered by the Ontario Health Insurance Plan (OHIP) and drugs required for medical assistance in dying will be available at no cost.

Where do Medications and Supplies come from for Medical Assistance in Dying?
The prescribing physician will complete an order prescription form with all the medications and supporting supplies required. The physician may choose to use a retail pharmacy or the contracted pharmacy associated with Waterloo Wellington LHIN Home and Community Care.
Can I have family and friends with me when I die?
Yes, you can have anyone you choose with you during assisted dying. You should discuss this with them well in advance to make sure they are willing to be present. The health care team will help prepare you and them. They need to understand what they will see before they agree.

Can others make the decision for me?
No, only you can make the decision to request assistance in dying. If you are not capable, others cannot make the decision for you.

Can I write down my wishes in case I lose capacity?
No, you must be able to ask for assisted dying at the time you wish to receive it. You cannot write your wishes for assistance in dying in an advance care plan (e.g., living will).

Can I change my mind?
Yes, you can change your mind at any time, for any reason. Simply tell a member of your health care team. If you change your mind, there will be no negative consequences; you will continue to receive high quality care. No one will think any less of you if you change your mind. Health care team members will ask you several times if you still wish to receive assistance in dying or have changed your mind.

What happens if I cannot sign?
If you are unable to sign and date the request, another person may sign for you. This person must:

- be at least 18 years of age
- understand that the patient is requesting assistance in dying, and
- not know or believe they will benefit under the patient’s will.

The signing must be done in the presence of the yourself and under your direction.
What if I have other questions?
If you have other questions, please ask a member of your health care team.

In Waterloo Wellington, you can also access information about MAID by calling 310-2222 or the provincial MAID Care Coordination Service @ 1-866-286-4023.

Finally, more information about MAID can be found on the following websites:
- Ministry of Health and Long Term Care
- WW Integrated Hospice Palliative Care
  http://wwwpalliativecare.ca/49/Medical_Assistance_in_Dying_MAID/