

Disability-Rights Organizations' Public Statement on the Urgent Need to Rethink Bill C-7, The Proposed Amendment to Canada's Medical Aid in Dying Legislation

COVID-19 Crisis has Exposed Systemic Ableism in Healthcare

COVID-19 has clearly revealed the ableism that is rampant in Canada's healthcare system. Over the past five months, we've seen not only the introduction of critical care triage protocols which identify the preexistence of a disability as an exclusion criterion for critical care, in the event that rationing of resources, such as ventilators, becomes necessary due to overwhelming demand; we've also seen elderly and disabled people who fall ill being left to die in nursing homes and never sent for medical care in hospitals. We are promised better facilities for warehousing elderly and disabled people, rather than in-home supports where the risk of contagion is lower. Provinces raise pay rates for personal support workers in nursing homes, luring away those who provided home care and stranding disabled and elderly people without community supports. In short, the policy failures that cause people to ask for assisted suicide and euthanasia have been laid bare and amplified, yet nothing is being done to change those policies. And the elective procedure that is MAiD continues apace, even as cancer and corrective procedures are postponed.

An Urgent Call to Re-Think Bill C-7

The Canadian disability-rights community remains united in denouncing Bill C-7 as an assault on the Equality Rights of people with disabilities. The flaws—and, indeed, the overt pro-MAiD bias—which characterized the “consultation” process leading up to the tabling of Bill C-7 are well documented. In short, everything from the online questionnaire to the in-person consultations were geared toward a pre-determined outcome, namely, the expansion of Medical Assistance in Dying as a legally- and socially-sanctioned substitute for assistance in living that we see in Bill C-7.

Many social commentators have contended that the COVID-19 crisis is instigating a sober re-thinking of our values and priorities as a society, and speculate that our “new normal” will include a new appreciation of both the value and the fragility of human life, and a consequent new commitment to protecting and supporting the lives of everyone, including those who require assistance with personal care. Disability-rights advocates are calling for a parallel sober re-think of the ways in which the lives of Canadians with disabilities can be both protected and supported, while maintaining a careful balance of equality rights and autonomy rights. This re-think needs to begin with the substantive revision of Bill C-7 before it is reintroduced.

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