



PHYSICIAN-ASSISTED DYING

In February 2015, the Supreme Court of Canada decided that it is against the Charter of Rights and Freedoms to prosecute a doctor for assisting someone with incurable suffering who wants to end their life.

Before the Supreme Court's ruling, both voluntary euthanasia and physician-assisted dying were illegal in Canada under the *Criminal Code*.

Physician-assisted dying will be legal in Canada starting June 6, 2016. This means that a person suffering from a serious and permanent illness will have the legal right to request medical help from a doctor to die when he/she is ready.

- The federal government needs to amend the *Criminal Code* by June 6, 2016. Provinces and territories will then have to build on the federal amendment to set up the laws, guidelines, and other rules required to provide physician-assisted dying in each province and territory. At this time, it is not known what the federal legislation will address.
- There are a number of issues that must be considered in setting up a framework for physician-assisted dying. These include:
 - who is eligible;
 - levels of patient understanding and knowledge required throughout the process;
 - how it will be done (i.e. what medications will be used, where it will be done, etc.); and
 - how to address conscientious objection by physicians.
- The NWT must also consider some unique issues, such as language and cultural implications; as well as the challenge of how to provide the service in a territory with a large amount of land with a small population (i.e. medical travel needs), and where many services are provided by nurses instead of physicians.
- The Department of Health and Social Services is working to set up a framework to provide physician-assisted dying in the NWT.
- A physician-assisted dying framework will establish the rules to make sure that assisted dying will be provided in a safe, fair, and caring manner, and only to those eligible persons who have specifically requested it.
- The NWT framework will need to find a balance that respects the decision of the Supreme Court of Canada and values the rights of patients and health care providers in a culturally appropriate manner.
- The NWT is working with the other provinces and territories to create similar frameworks. This will make sure there are no major differences in how physician-assisted dying is accessed and provided across Canada.
- The Department completed its initial public engagement with NWT professionals and the public on February 15th, 2016.
- The Department will carefully consider all comments and suggestions as it develops a framework.
- Assisted dying will be 100% voluntary. Patients and health care providers will not be forced to provide or participate in assisted dying.