



# ADVOCACY TOOLKIT AND ACTION GUIDE

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[www.dyingwithdignity.ca](http://www.dyingwithdignity.ca)

Dear DWDC volunteers and supporters,

Over a year ago, on March 17, 2021, Bill C-7 received Royal Assent and brought with it significant changes to Canada's medical assistance in dying (MAID) law. These changes are a result of the countless hours of advocacy by DWDC's dedicated volunteers and supporters like you across the country. From meeting with your elected officials, to writing letters and emails, you made these changes happen.

On behalf of everyone here at the national office, I want to thank you for your advocacy, your passion, and your commitment! But our work is not done.

Following the September 2021 federal election, the Special Joint Committee on Medical Assistance in Dying (MAID) reconvened on April 8, 2022, for its mandated Parliamentary Review of MAID. The Committee is currently studying the following five subject areas: advance requests, MAID for mature minors and those with a mental illness as a sole underlying condition, the state of palliative care in Canada, and the protection of Canadians with disabilities.

Since reconvening, the Committee has been meeting regularly. [On May 5, 2022](#), DWDC had the opportunity to [share its position on advance requests](#). We also submitted a brief to the Committee as we know many of you did, thank you for your support. On June 22, 2022, the Committee tabled its [interim report](#) focused on MAID for those with a mental disorder as the sole underlying condition. On October 17, the Committee is expected to table its final report, covering all aspects of the review.

This toolkit has been designed to provide you with the messaging and resources to effectively communicate to your MP DWDC's positions on the issues that are currently being studied during the mandated Parliamentary Review. This will ensure that critical issues like advance requests and access to MAID by people with a mental illness can be thoroughly considered and effective safeguards developed.

Thank you again for your advocacy work and support of Dying With Dignity Canada. It is only with the tremendous efforts of people like you that we can ensure the momentum you helped create from Bill C-7 results in further amendments that recognize the end-of-life rights of all people across Canada.



Helen Long  
CEO

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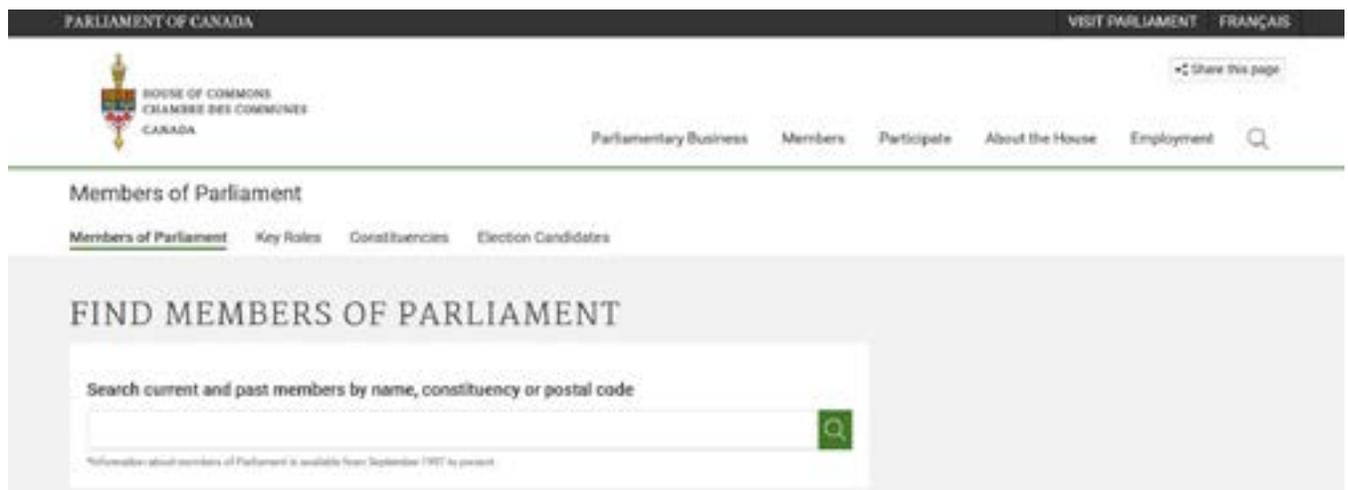
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# ENGAGING WITH YOUR MEMBER OF PARLIAMENT

## Who is your Member of Parliament (MP)?

If you don't know who your MP is, an easy way to find out is by visiting [www.ourcommons.ca/members/en](http://www.ourcommons.ca/members/en) and inserting your residential postal code.



## Requesting a meeting with your MP

When reaching out to your MP's office to request a meeting, remember that their schedules can be busy. It's better to propose a concise 15- or 20-minute meeting or a phone or video call than to be turned down for requesting an hour of their time.

A call from a constituent makes a real impact. Note that all MPs should be making themselves available to meet, so be sure to mention that you live in the riding when you are emailing/calling to request a meeting.

Make sure your request is polite and friendly, as well as non-partisan. Volunteers are reminded that as we are still navigating COVID-19, it is important to note that many meetings may be held via phone call or virtual meeting platform.

## Sample email meeting request to MP

**Subject:** Constituent meeting request re: Parliamentary Review of medical assistance in dying

Dear Mr./Ms./Dr. [Last Name],

As one of your constituents, I am writing to request a brief meeting with you to discuss the work of the Special Joint Committee on Medical Assistance in Dying (MAID). The Committee is currently studying advance requests, MAID for mature minors and those with a mental illness as a sole underlying condition, the state of palliative care in Canada, and the protection of Canadians with disabilities.

During our meeting, I would be pleased to discuss **(insert the topic or topics you would like to focus on)** and would appreciate 15 to 20 minutes to learn more about your views on **this/these** important issue**(s)**. As you may be aware the Committee is expected to table its final report on October 17, 2022.

I would appreciate 15 to 20 minutes to learn more about your views on these important issues.

Please let me know when would be best for your schedule.

Thank you,

**[Your name]**

**[Your postal code]**

**[Your contact information]**

## Familiarizing yourself with your MP

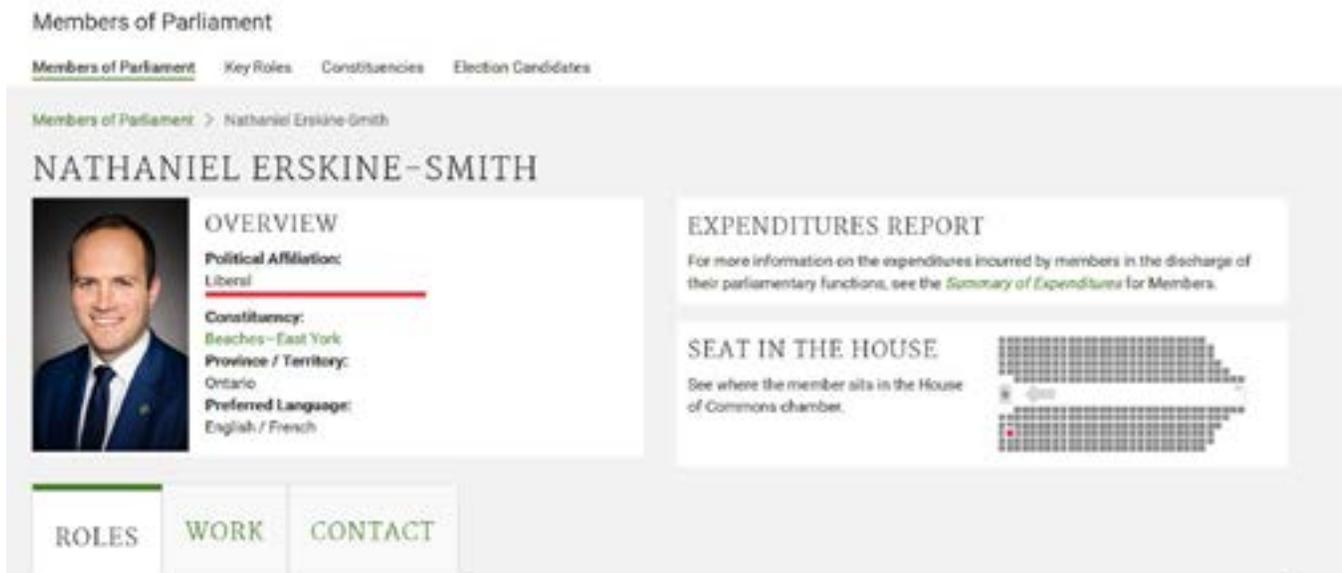
Once you have confirmed a meeting, it is important that you familiarize yourself with your MP's background.

### Returning MPs

DWDC volunteers and supporters are encouraged to visit [www.ourcommons.ca/Members/en](http://www.ourcommons.ca/Members/en) and view the Roles, Work and Contact tabs to view Members' experience in Parliament, their committee participation if any, and their contact information.

### New MPs

For new MPs who do not have any parliamentary experience, a simple Google search of their name should provide information on their personal and professional background and experience, and likely a biography.



The screenshot shows the profile page for Nathaniel Erskine-Smith on the Members of Parliament website. The page is titled "Members of Parliament" and includes navigation links for "Members of Parliament", "Key Roles", "Constituencies", and "Election Candidates". The profile for Nathaniel Erskine-Smith is displayed, featuring a photo and an "OVERVIEW" section with the following details: Political Affiliation: Liberal; Constituency: Beaches—East York; Province / Territory: Ontario; Preferred Language: English / French. To the right, there is an "EXPENDITURES REPORT" section with a link to the Summary of Expenditures for Members, and a "SEAT IN THE HOUSE" section with a grid showing the member's seating arrangement in the House of Commons chamber. At the bottom, there are three tabs: "ROLES", "WORK", and "CONTACT".

## Delivering Dying With Dignity Canada's (DWDC's) key messages

Now that you are more familiar with your MP, the meeting should be focused on educating them about your position on one or more of the five subject areas that the Special Joint Committee on MAID is currently studying. Issues such as advance requests, MAID for mature minors and those with a mental illness as a sole underlying condition, the state of palliative care in Canada, and the protection of Canadians with disabilities.

Volunteers and supporters are encouraged to use any or all of the five key message documents developed by DWDC, which are included in this package, to deliver the key messages in meetings with their MP.

DWDC also encourages volunteers and supporters – provided they feel comfortable doing so – to share their personal stories and lived experiences as they relate to the subject areas being discussed in the meeting.

### The meeting

Introduce yourself and why you are passionate about end-of-life rights, including the importance of the mandated Parliamentary Review of the five subject areas.

- Feel free to mention DWDC and your involvement
- Focus on delivering the points from the one-page documents and relating them back to why they are important to you
- Ask if the MP has any questions
- Let them know that you would be happy to provide any additional information and that more information is available at [dyingwithdignity.ca](http://dyingwithdignity.ca)
- Thank the MP for their time

After meeting with your MP, express your appreciation for their time by sending an email or a letter. This is also another opportunity to emphasize the key messages you communicated in your meeting. Feel free to personalize this thank you by including more details about what you discussed in your meeting.

## Sample Thank You Email / Letter

Dear Mr./Ms./Dr. [Last Name],

My name is [name] and I am a constituent of this riding. We met on [date] to discuss [list one or all of the subjects that were discussed]. As you know, [this issue or these issues] is/are currently being studied in a Parliamentary Review that is being led by the Special Joint Committee on Medical Assistance in Dying.

I would like to thank you for taking the time to meet with me. I am pleased to hear that you are concerned about the issues we discussed. I want to ensure that Canada protects end-of-life rights for those who are vulnerable and suffering and am calling on you and your party to respect the end-of-life rights of all people across Canada.

I greatly appreciate your time and your interest in protecting end-of-life rights in Canada. If I can provide any additional information, please do not hesitate to let me know.

Sincerely,

[Your name]

[Your postal code]

[Your contact information]



# SUMMARY OF DWDC POSITIONS

## DWDC Position on the Special Joint Committee and the Parliamentary Review

As an organization committed to inclusion, DWDC believes we must not only include but also value the perspectives of all people across Canada by actively seeking out, engaging, listening to, and collaborating with individuals and organizations from diverse backgrounds. Important concerns were raised by persons with disabilities, First Nations, Inuit and Métis peoples and members of other racialized communities during the debate on Bill C-7, and DWDC strongly recommends that the review includes thoughtful and appropriate engagement with all communities.

- An **advance request** for MAID would allow an individual to describe, in writing, a future state in which they would like to access MAID. It would allow those at risk of having medical or physical conditions that cause lack of capacity to provide informed consent at the time of the procedure, to avoid a life of intolerable suffering, if loss of capacity occurs. DWDC believes that advance requests should be allowed with or without a diagnosis of a grievous and irremediable medical condition.
- The **exclusion of individuals with a mental illness** from accessing their constitutional right is stigmatizing and discriminatory; and requests for MAID by people whose sole condition is a mental illness must be treated on a case- by-case basis. DWDC is pleased to see Bill C-7 limit this exclusion to March 17, 2023 and call for the convening of an expert panel to develop protocols and safeguards for access to MAID by individuals with a mental illness.

- DWDC encourages direct consultation with individuals living with disabilities and disability groups to ensure their concerns around safeguards are addressed while respecting autonomy rights. DWDC also strongly encourages **increasing investments into additional supports for people with disabilities**, including those targeted at enhancing income and social supports, reducing waiting lists for housing, specialist care, day programs and assistive devices, and assisting with the navigation of a complex and confusing health care system.
- As stated in our submission to the Special Joint Committee on MAID, DWDC “continues to support the recommendations outlined in Health Canada’s five-year plan titled, ‘Action Plan on Palliative Care: Building on the Framework of Palliative Care in Canada.’” The plan includes a key recommendation to raise awareness and understanding of how Advance Care Planning and palliative care can improve quality of life until the end of life.”
- DWDC asks that the existing age requirement of 18 years of age be amended to extend it to persons “at least 12 years of age and capable of making decisions with respect to their health.” DWDC also recommends that the informed consent of a competent parent or guardian be required for eligible minors seeking MAID who are 12 to 15 years of age inclusive, and that MAID assessors be required to consult a competent parent or guardian for eligible minors aged 16 and 17.

For more information, please contact [advocacy@dyingwithdignity.ca](mailto:advocacy@dyingwithdignity.ca).

## DWDC position: Advance requests

- DWDC hears on a daily basis from people across Canada who are concerned about their capacity to provide informed consent to MAID due to a neurocognitive condition (dementias like Alzheimer's, Parkinson's and Huntington's diseases) that may run in their family, an accident, or a medical problem that could result in diminished mental capacity such that they are no longer able to make decisions for themselves.
- An advance request for MAID involves a competent person making a written request for MAID that could be honoured later, after they lose the capacity to make medical decisions for themselves. An advance request for MAID would allow an individual to describe, in writing, a future state in which they would like to access MAID.
- The Ipsos poll commissioned by DWDC in 2022 asked respondents whether they would support advance requests for MAID. Overall support for advance requests for MAID by individuals with a grievous and irremediable medical condition is 85%.
- DWDC supports the enactment of legislation allowing competent adults in Canada to create an advance request for MAID with or without a diagnosis of a grievous and irremediable medical condition. This request could include a personal statement describing the circumstances they would consider to be intolerable suffering, but where they find themselves lacking the capacity to communicate this suffering or consent to receive MAID.
- 77% of respondents were supportive of advance requests for MAID for individuals who are competent at the time of the request, but do NOT have a diagnosis of a grievous and irremediable condition. This aligns with the federal government's own consultations in early 2020, in which 79% of respondents expressed support for advance requests for MAID by those without a diagnosis of a grievous and irremediable condition.

- Among Catholics, the level of support for advance requests is also at 83%, while support among people with disabilities is 84%.

For more information, please contact [advocacy@dyingwithdignity.ca](mailto:advocacy@dyingwithdignity.ca).

## DWDC position: Access to MAID by individuals with a mental illness

DWDC was pleased to see that in addition to the Parliamentary Review, Bill C-7 also committed to convening a panel of experts to recommend protocols, guidance, and safeguards to apply to requests made for medical assistance in dying by persons who have a mental illness. On May 13, 2022, we were pleased to see the Government of Canada release the final report of the Expert Panel on MAID and Mental Illness. This report has informed the Committee's [Interim Report on MAID and Mental Disorder as the Sole Underlying Condition](#).

- DWDC maintains that individuals seeking MAID where mental illness is the sole underlying medical condition should be assessed the same as those who are suffering from a grievous physical condition.
- Suffering caused by mental illness is no less “real” than suffering caused by a physical illness, injury, or disability. In many cases, symptoms of mental illness are indistinguishable from those caused by a non-psychiatric medical condition.
- A 2021 national survey conducted by Ipsos showed that 65% of Canadians support access to MAID for those whose sole underlying medical condition is a mental illness, if they meet all other criteria and have the capacity to provide informed consent.
- DWDC supports the repeal of the exclusion of those with a mental illness, which is stigmatizing, discriminatory and unconstitutional, effective March 17, 2023. We maintain that individuals suffering solely from mental illness ought to have the same eligibility for and access to MAID as those who suffer from physical or non-psychiatric medical conditions.
- DWDC recognizes that in cases where an individual has already been diagnosed with a mental illness, the MAID assessor may wish to engage or consult with a psychiatrist or

other specialist familiar with the individual's condition.

- DWDC believes that the sole unique safeguard needed for MAID requests from those with mental illness as their sole underlying medical condition is as follows: if an assessor has difficulty determining any eligibility criteria, they may: a) consult confidentially with outside medical expertise; or b) involve such experts in the assessment. If this assistance is requested, the MAID process cannot finish until the expert provides their opinion. A national list should be published of all qualifying specialists or experts in this regard.
- Concerning questions of whether a mental illness can be a grievous and irremediable condition, Dr. Mona Gupta, an Associate Clinical Professor and Chair of the Expert Panel on MAID and Mental Illness, clarified this matter for members of the Committee. On May 26, 2022, she stated that “[I]n order for a mental disorder to be a grievous and irremediable medical condition in the sense of the Criminal Code, it must be of long standing and the person must have had an extensive history of treatment and social supports. MAID is not intended for people in crisis or those who have not had access to health and social resources.”

For more information, please contact [advocacy@dyingwithdignity.ca](mailto:advocacy@dyingwithdignity.ca).

## **DWDC position: The protection of people living with disabilities**

- All people across Canada have the right to live their best life. To best understand the issues faced by people living with disabilities, and how best to support them with the resources they need, DWDC encourages proactive consultations, done in good faith, with people living with disabilities and disability organizations across Canada.
- DWDC strongly encourages increasing investments into additional supports for people with disabilities, including those targeted at enhancing income and social supports, reducing waiting lists for housing, specialist care, day programs and assistive devices, and assisting with the navigation of a complex and confusing health care system.
- We call for a commitment to fully support people with disabilities, so they have every opportunity to thrive. That is why DWDC urges all parliamentarians to support the passage of Bill C-22, the Canada Disability Act – federal legislation that will help reduce poverty and support the financial security of working-age persons with disabilities.
- During the Committee’s Parliamentary Review, persons with disabilities have indicated that they should be treated as individuals, not a monolith. The fears that some may have within the disability community must not hinder one’s access to choice. Everyone, including persons with disabilities, should therefore have both the right to live and the right to choose their end-of-life.
- With respect to concerns from disability groups, we must ensure that their concerns around safeguards are addressed while respecting autonomy rights. DWDC therefore urges the federal government to work and directly consult with individuals with disabilities and disability groups.

- In a column on June 7, 2022, André Picard, a health columnist for the Globe and Mail, commented on the need to improve social assistance for people with disabilities. On this point, he remarked that “The solution is not to condemn people with disabilities – physical or mental – to suffering. Yes, we should make it easier to live with dignity than die with dignity. But no one should be denied either. You don’t resolve one injustice by creating another.”

For more information, please contact [advocacy@dyingwithdignity.ca](mailto:advocacy@dyingwithdignity.ca).

## DWDC position: The state of palliative care

DWDC believes that everyone in Canada should be able to access the end-of-life care that they need and choose.

DWDC fully supports continued federal investments into expanding access to and improving the quality of end-of-life care.

While DWDC was pleased to see that the 2021 federal budget earmarked \$29.8 million over six years to improve access to palliative care, we agree with the Quality End-of-Life Care Collation of Canada (QELCC)'s view that more funding is required to deliver proper awareness, access and delivery of the palliative care service.

DWDC continues to support the recommendations outlined in Health Canada's five-year plan titled, "[Action Plan on Palliative Care: Building on the Framework of Palliative Care in Canada](#)." The plan includes a key recommendation to raise awareness and understanding of how Advance Care Planning and palliative care can improve quality of life until the end of life.

DWDC is also supportive of recommendations made by the QELCC to the Committee for its Parliamentary Review.

DWDC encourages the Committee to adopt QELCC's three recommendations: 1) The establishment of the Office of Palliative Care (OPC) – a centralized and national coordination office that was suggested by the Framework on Palliative Care in Canada; 2) new annual funding to create a Palliative Care Collaborative, comprised of federal, provincial, and territorial government representatives, key stakeholder groups, patient groups and caregivers, to implement the Framework on Palliative Care in Canada; and 3) the allocation of \$8.75 million of new funding over three years for palliative and end-of-life research.

- DWDC also supports QELCC's call for the federal government to report back on the progress in the implementation of the Framework in Palliative Care in Canada in December 2023.
- DWDC calls for continued action on improving access to and the quality of palliative care, such as:
  - Continue to provide funding to provincial/territorial governments designated for investment in end-of-life care.
  - Working with provincial and territorial partners to initiate a review and assessment of quality of care in seniors' residences.
  - Examining ways to increase funding for culturally appropriate end-of-life care.
  - Integrating modules on end-of-life care including palliative care and MAID into the curricula of schools of medicine and nursing, and continuing education programs so that practitioners have the basic skills to recommend and implement quality end-of-life care plans.
  - Respecting the dignity and autonomy of all people across Canada experiencing suffering intolerable to them and protect their constitutional right to be informed of all treatment options and to choose the course of action they feel is appropriate to their condition.

For more information, please contact [advocacy@dyingwithdignity.ca](mailto:advocacy@dyingwithdignity.ca).

## DWDC position: Access to MAID by mature minors

- In many jurisdictions across Canada, mature minors already have the right to make important decisions regarding their care. This includes the right to consent to or refuse lifesaving medical treatment.
- It is unfair to allow a 70-year-old with terminal cancer the choice of a peaceful death but deny a 12-year-old who has been given the same prognosis and demonstrates a clear capacity to make the decision as an adult, especially when the 12-year-old has the legal right to accept or refuse medical treatment that may prolong their life.
- DWDC agrees that the existing eligibility requirement that the person have a grievous and irremediable medical condition should apply to mature minors.
- With special eligibility criteria in place, and appropriate safeguards, DWDC believes mature minors should be allowed the right to choose MAID.
- DWDC recommends that the informed consent of a competent parent or guardian be required for eligible minors seeking MAID who are 12 to 15 years of age inclusive, and that MAID assessors be required to consult a competent parent or guardian for eligible minors aged 16 and 17.

For more information, please contact [advocacy@dyingwithdignity.ca](mailto:advocacy@dyingwithdignity.ca).

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