



Canadian Physicians
for *Life*

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Hon. Peter Milczyn
Chair, Standing Committee on Finance and Economic Affairs
99 Wellesley Street West,
Room 1405 Whitney Block Queen's Park,
M7A 1A2

Dear Mr. Milczyn:

We appreciate the opportunity to make a written submission to your Standing Committee on the issue of Bill 84, *An Act to Amend Various Acts with Respect to Medical Assistance in Dying*.

Canadian Physicians for Life was founded in 1975 by a Christian physician, a Jewish physician, and an atheist physician. These individuals came together to launch an organization where physicians, drawn together by their commitment to the principles of the traditional Hippocratic bioethic, which have guided the medical profession for the last two thousand years, could find community and promote life-affirming patient-centered care.

Forty years later, Canadian Physicians for Life remains a national, secular organization with a constituency of approximately 3,500 physicians, retired physicians, residents, and medical students.

We are dedicated to the respect and ethical treatment of every human being, regardless of age or infirmity. We promote public awareness of and professional adherence to the time-honoured Hippocratic medical tradition, which affirms the inviolability of every human life.

The College of Physicians and Surgeons of Ontario's two policies require physicians to participate in an effective referral. For our members, who cannot participate in the provision of MAID due to their conscience beliefs, this is a violation of their Charter-guaranteed right to freedom of conscience. These policies will push caring, passionate physicians out of the province or into retirement. There are already reports of this occurring at the same time that news of doctor shortages in Ontario receive regular media coverage.

These physicians have no desire to abandon their patients or to impose their beliefs on others. They are simply requesting the opportunity to step back from participating in a procedure they do not believe to be beneficial for their patients. It is for this reason we strongly urge the committee to consider Alberta's Care Coordination Service, as it has implemented protections for both patients and their physicians without sacrificing access to a legal procedure or Charter protected human rights.



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In Ontario, the Care Coordination Service could be directly accessible to the public through Telehealth Ontario. Patients, their loved ones, or their caregivers could make the request for assessment directly through the already existing toll-free number. This would ensure every patient in Ontario desiring an assessment would have the ability to request one.

Ontario is the unique jurisdiction in the world to require referral for MAID. We do not believe that Ontario should be a trailblazer in this regard. To do so will only serve to push out caring practitioners who desire to care for Ontario patients, without increasing patient access to the procedure.

Further, to force doctors from the practice of medicine or to require them to limit their practice options, as some have already suggested, would create a homogenous medical community which fails to reflect the vibrant and plural society we have in Ontario.

Canadian Physicians for Life's staff receive, on a regular basis, requests from patients seeking to be paired with physicians who share their perspectives or beliefs on their care. This is not unique to our organization. Patients have long sought to work with physicians who share their religious beliefs, principles, or attitudes in their approach to healthcare. To remove physicians who hold to the traditional Hippocratic ethic from general practice would be to rob Ontario patients of choice in their healthcare.

We therefore request the following steps be taken to ensure the protection of physician conscience rights:

1. Amending Bill 84 to include a provision to protect the conscience rights of physicians and health care practitioners who cannot participate in the provision of MAID, either by providing it, assisting in the provision of it, making arrangements for it, or referring for it.
2. Creation of a Care Coordination Service consistent with the Alberta model, which ensures protections for both physicians and patients. Unlike the proposed Ontario model, it does not require physician referral.

Thank you for receiving our submission. We hope to work alongside the province in ensuring a healthcare system that reflects the diversity and plurality of the Ontario public.

Sincerely,

Faye Sonier
Executive Director & General Legal Counsel