

Medical assistance in dying

Guide for loved ones

Medical assistance in dying in Quebec

In Quebec medical assistance in dying is offered to persons suffering from a grievous and irremediable medical condition with significant and ongoing pain making their life difficult to cope with.

For a minority of people affected by such conditions, it may happen that support and care, including palliative care, are inadequate to provide sufficient pain relief.

The law on end-of-life care gives access to another care option to these people for whom all therapeutic, curative and palliative options are considered inadequate and who prefer dying rather than keep on suffering.

Serious reflection is given to such a decision based on medical and personal considerations to end ongoing and unbearable pain. In fact, the decision to resort to medical assistance in dying belongs solely to the sick person.

For those who stay, the decision of their loved one to choose medical assistance in dying may give rise to a lot of emotions.

Thus the creation of this guide which is meant to be a reflection and information tool.



This guide is designed as a tool to support the experience families and loved ones go through and under no circumstances does it replace the information contained in the Act respecting end-of-life care.





Why choose medical assistance in dying?

Choosing to ask for medical assistance in dying is a complex and personal decision which is often based on multiple considerations. Here are various reasons why your loved one might wish to ask for medical assistance in dying.

Relief of unbearable pain

Your loved one may suffer from ongoing and unbearable physical, psychological or existential pain despite the care and medical treatments available.

Fading of their quality of life

The disease has a serious impact on their life resulting in their incapacity to find satisfaction or comfort in their daily activities.

Loss of their autonomy

Many sick people are afraid of losing their autonomy, their dignity and their capacity to take care of themselves which can become a great source of anxiety.

Control on their end of life

A sick person might wish to have control over their end-of-life moment.

When a loved one announces that they consider or chose having recourse to medical assistance in dying, their close ones might feel a wide range of complex and sometimes conflicting emotions, such as:

Shock and surprise

The news might be distressing for people close to them, specially if it was not expected or if some people in their circle of family and friends were not aware of the evolution of their suffering.

Sadness

Although everybody can understand that this choice aims at putting an end to their suffering, it is totally normal to feel sadness when learning about this decision.

Anger and frustration

Such a decision might cause loved ones to feel angry at the person or frustrated toward the disease or the circumstances that lead to that decision.

Feeling of abandonment or rejection

The choice of a person to ask for medical assistance in dying might trigger a feeling of abandonment, not to say exclusion. It is important that their nearest and dearest understand that the sick person is entirely responsible for this decision. What the person is asking for, at this time in their life, is to put an end to their suffering.

Confusion and uncertainty

The person choosing to receive medical assistance in dying based their decision on a profound reflection. Their close ones may not understand their deep motivations leading to such a decision.

Anxiety and concerns

People close to someone requesting medical assistance in dying may feel anxiety and have concerns that could affect their relationship with them.

Feeling of relief

In some cases, specially if the loved one is suffering tremendously, their close ones could feel some relief since the person chose themselves to put an end to their suffering.

Reference points to help close ones live through the last days as serenely as possible

Start a conversation

Discuss sincerely and without taboos with the person at the end of life about their wishes and expectations regarding medical assistance in dying and death. You and that person might not share the same concerns. Do not hesitate to ask for support and advice from the members of our benevolent team.



Create a calm and comfortable ambiance so that the person feels free to express themselves. Playing soft music or diffusing essential oils are examples of means to create such an environment.

Show them your love, share memories, reminiscence or anecdotes. Do not hesitate to express what you truly feel.

Talk about those precious moments that you shared and how this person has enriched your life.

Make sure you provide them a warm, calming and comforting emotional support. Let the person express their feelings and concerns without judgement.

Be present

Express your support to the person at end of life through loving and gentle gestures : hold their hand, talk softly, let your presence help put their mind at rest. Pay a benevolent attention to their needs and make sure they feel confident to talk freely. Lend a humanely ear, even though some words might be difficult to hear, respecting their emotions and rhythm.

Get ready to say goodbye

Propose organizing a ritual aligned with who they truly are, whether it be religious, spiritual or else, even though it might seem difficult. The person providing spiritual services and Pallia-Vie's team can support you in your endeavour.

Think about funeral arrangements

If possible, involve the person at end of life in the decision making regarding the funeral arrangements (choice of funeral home, clothes, music, etc.). Being involved in the process will lighten the emotional charge during the last moments.

If you feel the need to, before their death, participate in a meeting offered by the psychosocial and spiritual supportive team of the Maison.



Take care of yourself

Take a break regularly, take time for yourself, take advantage of what makes you feel good. It is important not to push yourself too hard at the expense of your health.

Share your feelings with people close to you, family, friends and if you wish, with Pallia-Vie's staff, someone you trust and to whom you can express your concerns openly and honestly.

Be benevolent with yourself. You are certainly doing your best living through these exceptional and difficult times.

Respect your limitations and if medical assistance in dying is against your values, talk to the team about your fears and concerns. They will offer you the necessary support allowing you to have a better understanding of the request of the person at end of life.

In conclusion

Do not hesitate to talk openly about your feelings and concerns and above all get support for yourself, if you feel the need to.

Pallia-Vie's support services offer support to bereaved individuals and groups.

These support services are free thanks to the generosity of our valuable donors. To learn more about these services or if you need to resort to them, contact Pallia-Vie's Support services team at (450) 431-3331.



Frequently Asked Questions

Is the person suffering while the medical assistance in dying is administered?

No, the medication leads to coma, the person does not suffer.

Should the family be involved in the decision-making process?

No, the decision belongs solely to the person concerned, they are the one deciding if they wish to inform or consult their close ones.

What is the role of the family in the process?

The family is there to support the person at end of life throughout the whole process, from the request to the administration of the medical assistance in dying.

Is it normal to wonder about the link between suicide and medical assistance in dying?

These notions might create confusion for some people. Our team is available to support you through this reflection.

Being present or not when the medical assistance in dying is administered is stressful. How to decide whether or not to be present?

An honest discussion with the person at end of life can help you. Pallia-Vie's team can support you and provide some thoughts for reflection and answer your questions. Respect who you are.

Can children be present when the medical assistance in dying is administered?

Yes, if the person receiving the medical assistance in dying wishes for them to be present and if the children agree.

How to explain medical assistance in dying to children?

Choose simple words suited for their age. Without preceding them, answer their questions (Who will be present? What will be used? How long does it take for death to occur? etc.). It must be clear to the child that they can change their mind at any time regarding their presence during the medical assistance in dying process.

Ask the staff for support if need be. Let the children take their own decision. Plan having someone to accompany the child should they wish to leave while the medical assistance in dying is administered.