

# House of Commons passes Bill C-7 opening assisted death to the mentally ill

Euthanasia opponents are slamming the federal Liberals who, with Bloc Quebecois support, have opened the door for the mentally ill to access the medical aid in dying (MAiD) system.

Critics say it is shameful the Liberals and Bloc Quebecois put a time limit on debate on a matter of life and death that opens the door to the mentally ill being allowed to kill themselves with the help of a doctor. The Bloc joined with the Liberals to impose closure on the debate to force a vote on the bill.

“While the federal government was noting the 11th anniversary of Canada’s signing of the UN Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities, the House of Commons passed Bill C-7 thereby making MAiD available to healthy people with disabilities,” a statement released by the Council of Canadians with Disabilities said.

“In the case of mental illness, MAiD is a permanent lethal solution for a temporary situation,” said Jewelles Smith, a spokesperson for the council.

Allowing the mentally ill access to assisted dying was not originally supported by the Liberals, but after that was made a requirement for support by the Senate, it came back before the House resulting in the vote March 11. MPs voted 180-149 in support of Bill C-7. No Conservatives or NDP MPs voted in favour of the bill.

The bill changes the law so that it complies with a 2019 Quebec Superior Court ruling that said limiting MAiD to only Canadians whose death was already “reasonably foreseeable” was too restrictive.

The Senate wanted the federal government to eliminate a blanket ban on the mentally ill from accessing a medical death for 18 months. The House agreed to allow the mentally ill access to MAiD in two years, after further study and safeguards surrounding MAiD and the mentally ill can be reviewed.

The disabilities council in a March 15 statement said Bill C-7 “will put vulnerable people with disabilities in harm’s way by making it easier to access medical aid in dying.”

“While many people with disabilities cannot access the disability-related supports that they need to live dignified lives in the community, they will be able to get MAiD. Even people experiencing a mental health crisis will have

access to MAID,” the statement said.

“We are extremely concerned that people with disabilities experiencing a temporary crisis will accept MAiD and die needlessly,” said Smith.

The Centre for Addiction and Mental Health (CAMH) said opening up assisted dying to the mentally ill is a mistake without more evidence of what exactly constitutes mental illness.

In its position paper “CAMH came to the decision that the federal government should not make an amendment to MAiD legislation for people with mental illness as their sole underlying medical condition at this time due to a lack of evidence that mental illness is an irremediable medical condition.”

“This was not an easy decision for CAMH to come to,” the CAMH statement to Parliament said. “As psychiatrists, we cannot stay out of it. We cannot ignore, avoid or just rubber stamp our patients’ requests for MAiD. This is not only because of the ‘medical’ in MAiD but also because of our duty to advocate for the best evidence-informed care for our clients.”

The Euthanasia Prevention Coalition’s Alex Schadenberg said opening the door to the mentally ill to access MAiD is “shameful,” but it does expose what opponents have been saying all along – once you open the door to legal euthanasia it will continue to expand to cover more and more Canadians.

“The fact is that the Liberal government, the BQ and the euthanasia lobby have clearly told Canadians where they stand,” said Schadenberg.

“They are not concerned about the lives of people with disabilities or those who live with chronic conditions. They are not concerned about people who struggle with mental illness or other psychological conditions. They are not concerned about people who are at a vulnerable time of their life.”

The revised bill still must go before the Senate for final approval. The government has sought four extensions to have the bill passed, the final extension set to expire March 26.