

Press Release

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CASP Urges Action on Canadian National Suicide Prevention Strategy Before Parliament Considers Legislation on Assisted Suicide.

In response to the proposed legislation before the House of Commons seeking to legalize assisted suicide, the Canadian Association for Suicide Prevention (CASP) is asking the federal government to take action and support a Canadian National Strategy for Suicide Prevention. If proposed Bill C-384 were to pass, Canada's criminal code would be amended to make provision for assisted suicide, including for people living with persistent mental pain. Suicide claims approximately 1,000,000 lives worldwide every year. Nearly 4,000 Canadian lives (more than 10 per day) are lost to this devastating and preventable form of death every year.

The World Health Organization and United Nations have called for worldwide initiatives to prevent suicide by creating and implementing national suicide prevention strategies. Canada remains one of the few industrialized countries in the world without such a strategy. CASP has created a Blueprint for a Canadian National Suicide Prevention Strategy and is eagerly looking forward to partnering with federal and provincial governments in creating a uniquely Canadian strategy.

“Most people who die by suicide experience intense feelings of sadness and emotional pain, and feel hopeless about that pain ever diminishing. The many added stressors in peoples' lives may diminish their capacity to cope, lower their resiliency, and increase their vulnerability to thoughts of suicide,” Tim Wall, Executive Director of CASP said. “What is especially tragic is that suicide can be prevented with compassion, understanding, and access to appropriate services. In fact, most people who are suffering and at risk for suicide can recover and experience a life that is meaningful, hopeful, and satisfying.”

Marion Cooper, President of CASP adds, “Assisted suicide is a complex issue for which there is no easy answer. It is our belief and one shared by our partners in mental and public health services that before we start a national conversation on assisted suicide we must first begin a national conversation for preventing suicide, and join our neighbours in the United States, the United Kingdom, New Zealand, Australia, and many European nations in creating a national suicide prevention strategy.”

CASP stands ready to take the lead in such a critical conversation, joining in partnership with federal and provincial governments and other interested professional associations and community advocacy groups. CASP does not take

a position for or against assisted suicide rather, is focused on suicide prevention. The goal for CASP is to have the federal government take specific and direct action on suicide prevention as an important public health issue.

“Let us take the opportunity to learn from the experiences of those who have travelled this route before, and not simply try to legislate death as an alternative to human suffering,” psychologist and CASP Vice President Dr. Marnin Heisel said.

Research suggests that requests for assisted suicide, where legal, are not being made to alleviate intractable pain and suffering so much as to stave off fears of loss of control, autonomy, and physical functioning. Appropriate interventions could thus involve mental health care to alleviate fears of loss of control and assist in finding meaning in one’s circumstances, pain management to alleviate physical pain, and rehabilitation to enhance functioning.

Heisel notes that the legislation proposed in Bill C-384 could paradoxically restrict personal freedom in the guise of enhancing it. Subtly suggesting that those with physical challenges and/or mental disorders consider suicide to alleviate their perceived burden on society creates a slippery slope and threatens core Canadian values of social conscience and preservation of human dignity.

For more information on CASP’s Blue Print for a National Suicide Prevention Strategy go to www.casp-acps.ca.

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