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Large Majority (86%) of Canadians Support (50% Strongly/36% Somewhat) Supreme Court of Canada Decision about Medical Assistance in Dying

71% in Favour (32% Strongly/39% Somewhat) of Removing “Reasonably Foreseeable” Requirement for MAID, Siding with Quebec Superior Court Ruling

Toronto, ON, February 6, 2020 — As the federal government debates making changes to its own medically assisted dying legislation, it appears that a large number of Canadians are in favour of making changes to the existing law that would expand access to MAID, though still within a narrow range of circumstances. A recent poll by Ipsos carried out on behalf of Dying With Dignity Canada has found that over 8 in 10 (86%) Canadians support (50% strongly/36% somewhat) the Supreme Court of Canada’s decision to recognize medical assistance in dying (MAID) as a constitutionally-protected right, given that patients satisfy a series of stringent qualifying criteria.

However, there is more to the story. A year after the Supreme Court decision, Parliament responded by passing legislation that limited access to MAID to those patients whose natural deaths are ‘reasonably foreseeable’ (also known as Bill C-14). This is the very same legislation currently being debated in Parliament. A Quebec Superior Court earlier ruled that this requirement was unconstitutional, violating one’s right to personal autonomy. This same Ipsos poll found that a majority (71%) of Canadians support (32% strongly/39% somewhat) removing this ‘reasonably foreseeable’ requirement, thereby siding with the Quebec Superior Court.

All Very Well in Theory, But What about in Practice?

Without a doubt, medical assistance in dying is a highly emotionally charged issue and the recent debates in Canada have been no exception. Although on the surface there seems to be a large amount of support for making MAID more accessible to a small number of patients who are most in need, would Canadians be as accepting when presented with specific scenarios under which MAID could be administered? Would it be the case that Canadians would be supportive of MAID *in theory*, but recoil when asked about administering it *in practice*?

One issue at the heart of the current discussion about MAID in Canada is whether consent can be given in advance when a patient is fully competent, then be binding at a later time when the patient is no longer competent. This is because current legislation requires that patients be competent both at the time of request and at the time of administering MAID. When presented with the example of a patient who meets all the requirements and is competent at the time of requesting MAID, but loses competency before the procedure can be carried out (for example, due to coma), 85% of Canadians support (46% strongly/39% somewhat) carrying out MAID, thereby respecting the patient’s request.





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Under this scenario, support for MAID is consistently strong in several key demographic groups, more specifically:

- **Region:** In no region does support dip below 82%; in fact, it even reaches 89% in Quebec and Atlantic Canada, respectively.
- **Health care practitioners/professionals:** HCPs are similarly supportive (82%; 38% strongly/45% somewhat) and there is no statistically significant difference with non-HCPs.
- **Chronic physical/mental condition or disability:** 84% of those who report having a chronic condition or disability would also support (47% strongly/37% somewhat) MAID in this scenario.
- **Vote choice:** Support also transcends political lines, remaining high among supporters of the three major federal parties – NDP (88%; 55% strongly/33% somewhat), Liberal (87%; 49% strongly/38% somewhat), and Conservative (82%; 40% strongly/42% somewhat).
- **Religious identity:** Self-identified religious association does not seem to play a large role; 86% of those reporting a Catholic identity and 79% of those reporting a Protestant Christian identity would also support MAID, given the above concrete circumstance.

Another scenario presented to Canadians involved a situation where a patient with a grievous and irremediable condition is competent at the time of requesting MAID, but at the time of administering it is not competent (for example, due to dementia). Over 8 in 10 (82%) support (43% strongly/39% somewhat) allowing the patient to make an advanced request for MAID.

Finally, a third scenario involved whether Canadians would be supportive of allowing a patient without a diagnosis for a grievous and irremediable illness to make an advanced request for physician-assisted dying that would be honoured if certain pre-stated conditions were met. In this case, 75% would support (35% strongly/40% somewhat) allowing MAID to be carried out.



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About the Study

These are some of the findings of an Ipsos poll conducted between January 21-27, 2020, on behalf of Dying with Dignity Canada. For this survey, a sample of 3,502 Canadians aged 18 years and over was interviewed. Weighting was then employed to balance demographics to ensure that the sample's composition reflects that of the adult population according to Census data and to provide results intended to approximate the sample universe. The precision of Ipsos online polls is measured using a credibility interval. In this case, the poll is accurate to within ± 1.9 percentage points, 19 times out of 20, had all Canadian adults been polled. The credibility interval will be wider among subsets of the population. All sample surveys and polls may be subject to other sources of error, including, but not limited to coverage error, and measurement error.

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About Ipsos

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