

Medical Assistance in Dying (MAiD)

MAiD Support & Bereavement Guide

Thinking about the end of your life and about saying goodbye to those you love, you may feel a deep sense of grief and sadness. You may also feel relieved to have some control over when and how you will die, and in knowing that this plan is in place.

This brochure aims to answer any questions you may have, provide practical information, and ease your concerns on your Medical Assistance in Dying (MAiD) journey.

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Before MAiD

You have likely put a great deal of thought into your decision to request MAiD. Faced with intolerable suffering due to advanced illness, incurable disease, or disability, you have determined that at some point your symptoms and decline will become intolerable and you will wish to have an assisted death.

Assessment Period

The original MAiD legislation required a 10 day reflection period—this is no longer required. For a small percentage of persons who apply, whose natural death may be considered “NOT reasonably foreseeable,” there is a 90 day “assessment period” that begins on the day the MAiD Assessor begins their assessment with you (this day counts as Day 0).

If your Doctor or NP has informed you that you are in this category, you may have mixed emotions about this. However, this may be a time of opportunity where you can work through any questions, fears, and worries you may still have while allowing the healthcare providers to gather the required information from experts.

Living with dying may be new to you and you may also experience anticipatory grief.¹ You may decide to hold off on setting the date for MAiD to wait and see how things progress. Or, you may have been thinking about this a long time and want to proceed. During this time, you may want to focus on the people and activities you enjoy most and consider:

By this time, you may have had or are in the process of undergoing formal assessment with one or more physicians or nurse practitioners (NPs), are aware of the options available to you, and have also completed the Patient Request Form.

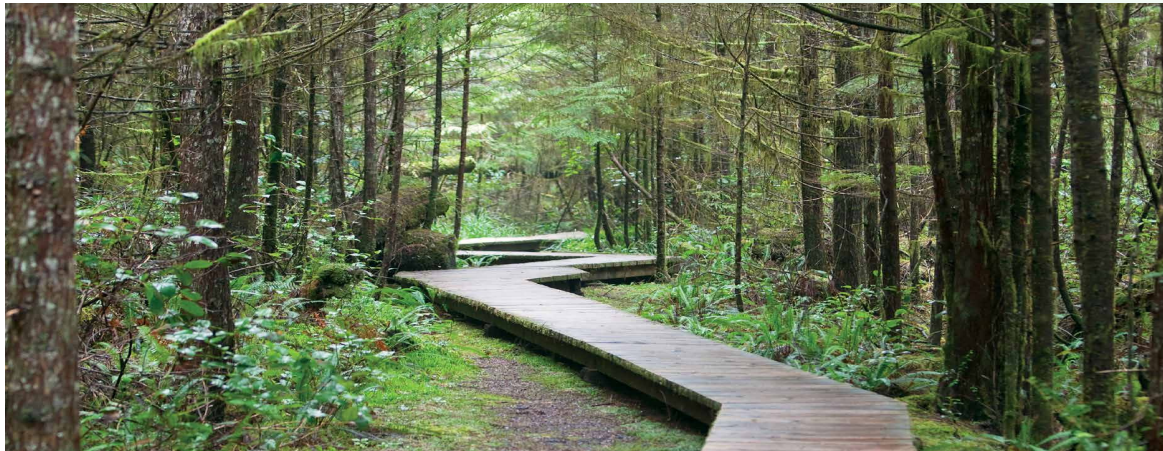
- ▶ How would I like to spend this time (alone, with others or a combination)?
- ▶ What do I most want to do (practical tasks, outings, projects, bucket list activities)?
- ▶ Who should I see and what is important for me to say to these people?
- ▶ What memories or stories do I want to share (highlights, achievements, regrets)?
- ▶ Share information and memories with your family and friends in a way that works for you, whether written or recorded.
- ▶ Do not postpone difficult decisions or conversations; talking about hard things will resolve anxiety and contribute to your peace of mind.
- ▶ What do I need and want help with, and who can help me?
- ▶ Those close to you may experience anticipatory grief; talk with each other and/or a professional if needed.
- ▶ If you have questions or concerns, talk with your family, friends, physician or NP.
- ▶ This is naturally a time of reflection, but also take the time to enjoy yourself.

¹ Anticipatory grief is defined as “a feeling of grief occurring before an impending loss.”

When the date for MAiD is set

Once you and the physician or NP providing MAiD have chosen a date, it may be reassuring and comforting to make plans for how to approach the time before, during, and after the procedure. It's important to remember that you can ask questions and you can change your mind at any time prior to when the medication is given. As you plan for how things are to proceed, the following practical information may help guide your thinking:

- ▶ You will need to make funeral arrangements and let the funeral home know you have a date arranged.
- ▶ Do you have a will and is it up to date?
- ▶ If you are under 75, have you considered eye donation?
- ▶ Have you considered organ donation? In certain cases this is possible after MAiD. The question is on the request form, and your physician or NP can put you in touch with the team from BC Transplant if you wish to discuss it further.
- ▶ Does the MAiD provider know your wishes regarding the above points?



When someone close to you has requested MAiD

When a family member or close friend has requested MAiD, it is common to experience a wide range of feelings and reactions. Even if you are supporting the choice, it is normal to have conflicting thoughts and emotions. This is a natural part of anticipatory grief and adjusting to loss.

Remember that your views are based on your personal beliefs and life experiences that may not be the same as those of your loved one. If you are strongly opposed to this decision, it may be helpful to find other people or professionals who can listen and provide support.

In the time leading up to your loved one's assisted death, it may help to consider the following ideas:

- ▶ Acknowledge the decision for MAiD that has been made and invite a conversation about it if your loved one is receptive. Listen with compassion and a non-judgmental open mind. Avoid persistent questions.
- ▶ How would I like to spend time with my friend or family member?
- ▶ What is important that we do or see together (intimacy, socializing, sharing stories, travel)?
- ▶ What is important for us to say to each other (words of love, forgiveness, thanks, encouragement)?
- ▶ What would I like to know about them that I don't yet know?
- ▶ How can I help support them (errands, paperwork, organizing care givers)?
- ▶ Who can support me during this difficult time (for emotional support or help with planning and communication)?
- ▶ What can I do to keep calm and well (exercise, time with friends or pets, eating and sleeping regularly)?
- ▶ You may not always know what to say or do, and that's okay. If you unintentionally say or do something you later regret, it is okay to apologize, to offer and/or ask for forgiveness and to ask for help.

Preparing for the day of the MAiD

Times of great love and togetherness may be mixed with times of deep sadness. Plan to take time and space to rest and reset as needed. Be patient and generous with yourself and each other.

Try to be flexible about what happens and make adjustments if needed. If your original plans no longer feel 'right', allow yourself to revise the plan as needed. You may want to pick just one or two

important aspects to maintain, such as the setting or the people present.

Questions to consider about the day itself

- ▶ Do you have any questions for the physician or NP about what to expect or what you can or cannot do at this time?
- ▶ Clarify whether there will be another health care provider assisting the physician or NP.
- ▶ What time of day would you prefer the MAiD to occur?
- ▶ Where would you prefer the MAiD to occur (at home, in hospital, outside)?
- ▶ Consider who you would like to be present on the actual day. Have you talked with them?
- ▶ Consider talking with the physician or NP about how many people can be with you at this time.
- ▶ Consider using virtual technology such as Zoom or Skype to allow more people to be present if desired.
- ▶ What do you want to do, see, eat, or feel on this day?
- ▶ What would you like to wear?
- ▶ Where would people like to be in relation to you (sitting or lying next to, holding hands with, nearby, in or out of sight)?
- ▶ If there are children or pets, where would you like them to be?
- ▶ Is there anything you want to happen prior to the administration (i.e. a kiss or hug, a prayer, special music, or a favourite reading)?
- ▶ Do you wish one specific person to be responsible for "managing" the process? Do they have a clear idea of your wishes for the day?

Preparing for when the medication is administered

When the physician or NP arrives, they will confirm with you that MAiD is still desired, you will sign a final consent, and he or she will review the process with those that have gathered.

You will be given medication orally or by injection to induce sedation, loss of consciousness, coma, and death as you have requested.

There may be breathing changes such as deep breaths and/or snoring. Loss of bowel or bladder control is rare. Eventually breathing stops and the physician/NP will confirm that death has occurred.



After MAiD has Occurred: Considerations for Family and Friends



Some who have chosen to be present during the death may leave the room afterwards, while others will want to stay for some period of time. If you witness the death, you may feel anxious, upset, calm or restless. This response is natural; sit comfortably and focus on breathing deeply and steadily. Here is what to expect when the death has occurred:

- ▶ When friends and family are ready, a health care team member may remove medical devices such as needles, catheter, hearing aids and also any jewelry that is not meant to stay with the person.
- ▶ If eye donation has been requested, remind the physician or NP and the transfer team. They will call and notify the Eye Bank.
- ▶ You will want to call the funeral home to notify them that death has occurred and to request the transfer team to come. Sometimes a member of the health care team will make this call on your behalf. It is a similar process in hospital or long term care.
- ▶ There may be a 1–2 hour wait before the team comes to move your loved one to the funeral home. Let the health care team know your wishes for this time: if you plan to stay or not, or want a longer waiting period.

Considerations

- ▶ Who, if anyone, would you like to be with you following the death?
- ▶ What, if anything, is important for you to do in the time following the death?
- ▶ How much time would you like to have with the person before the transfer team comes?
- ▶ What clothes, personal belongings, or special items would you like cremated or buried with the person?
- ▶ If the death does not occur at home, is there someone you would like to pick you up and drive you home?
- ▶ Make a plan for the next few days, taking into consideration what if anything you need to do and if you would like family and friends to be with you.
- ▶ Consider seeing your family physician/NP for a checkup sometime in the next couple of months. Grief can be hard on your physical and emotional health.
- ▶ Be aware of the grief support resources available in your community.

Bereavement information

Grief, like love, is often permanent. When the person who died was important to you, you will remember and miss that person for the rest of your life. However, grief usually lessens and lightens over time.

In the early months of your bereavement it is important to allow yourself to feel the loss and to think and talk about the person who died. It is also important to stay involved in relationships and activities that help restore a sense of meaning and purpose to your life. If you find the intensity of your grief stays the same or is getting stronger over time, it is important to talk with your family physician or a grief counsellor.

While the majority of Canadians are accepting of MAiD, you may still encounter people who aren't supportive; who make hurtful comments or withdraw their care and attention. While this painful stigma may continue, we are hopeful that you will seek out and find those who can provide unconditional support. The information about bereavement resources may be of assistance as you continue your journey with grief.

Bereavement resources and supports

If you or someone you know is in crisis, please call the 24 hour Vancouver Island Crisis Line:

- ▶ 1-888-494-3888
- ▶ www.vicrisis.ca

or go to your nearest hospital emergency department.

Virtual Victoria MAiD Bereavement Support Group

Open to family and friends across Vancouver Island.

For information contact:
Oceanna Hall, M.Div M.Ed.
CASC Clinical Specialist
250-886-1077



Hospice Societies on Vancouver Island

Hospice Societies on Vancouver Island offer a range of bereavement supports. Please check the one closest to you for additional resources and specific information.

- ▶ Alberni Hospice Society
www.albernihospice.ca
- ▶ Campbell River Hospice Society
www.crhospice.ca
- ▶ Comox Valley Hospice Society
www.comoxhospice.com
- ▶ Cowichan Valley Hospice Society
www.cowichanvalleyhospice.org
- ▶ Nanaimo Community Hospice Society
www.nanaimohospice.com
- ▶ Oceanside Hospice Society
www.oceansidehospice.com
- ▶ Pacific Rim Hospice Society
www.pacificrimhospice.ca
- ▶ Saltspring Hospice Society
www.saltspringhospice.org
- ▶ Sooke Hospice Society
www.sookehospice.com
- ▶ Victoria Hospice Society
www.victoriahospice.org

Online Bereavement Resources and Supports

Victoria Hospice provides booklets and pamphlets about many aspects of grief and bereavement. You can access them online at: www.victoriahospice.org/patients-families/useful-brochures.

Some of the titles are listed below:

- ▶ *Ten Things to Know About Grief*
- ▶ *Child and Teen Grief*
- ▶ *Grief: What Makes it Difficult*
- ▶ *Grief: Coping with Challenges*
- ▶ *Grief: Understanding your Emotions*

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- ▶ **BC Bereavement Helpline** is a resource for people to find bereavement support within their own community. www.bcbh.ca
phone 1-877-779-2223
- ▶ **Bridge C-14** provides compassionate support to families throughout their journey with MAiD. www.bridgec14.org
- ▶ MAiD Family Support Society provides 1:1 compassionate, lived-experience support to persons or families. www.maidfamilysupport.ca
- ▶ **Canadian Association of MAiD Assessors and Providers** www.camapcanada.ca
- ▶ **Canadian Virtual Hospice “Ask A Professional”** is a resource that offers a way to submit questions to health care providers, including grief counsellors. www.virtualhospice.ca
- ▶ **Compassionate Friends** is a peer support group for parents who have experienced the death of a child (of any age). www.tcfcCanada.net
- ▶ Dying with Dignity Canada advocating for assisted dying rules and other end of life options. www.dyingwithdignity.ca
- ▶ **KidsGrief.ca** is an interactive network of information and support for parents and caregivers supporting bereaved children and youth. www.kidsgrief.ca
- ▶ **Learning Through Loss** offers grief and loss education and supportive programs for youth. www.learningthroughloss.org
- ▶ **MyGrief.ca** is an interactive network of information and support for people dealing with life-threatening illness and loss. www.mygrief.ca
- ▶ **Talksuicide.ca** offers suicide prevention, education, and support.
- ▶ **Youthspace.ca** is a community of volunteers available to support youth via text, chat, forum and email counselling. www.youthspace.ca
- ▶ **Service Canada** provides a list that can help you identify what to do when someone dies. <https://www.canada.ca/en/revenue-agency/services/forms-publications/publications/rc4111/canada-revenue-agency-what-following-a-death.html>

