

Supreme Court Ruling Alters End-of-Life Decisions for Canadians



Sometimes decisions made by our elected representatives or by court challenges can fundamentally change the way we live our lives up to and including what happens at the end of our lives. The recent decision of the Carter case by the Supreme Court of Canada is one of those decisions that can alter end-of-life for all Canadians.

Canadians with disabilities are extremely concerned about the implications of this ruling.

In essence, the Supreme Court ruled that a law that makes it illegal for anyone to help people end their own lives should be amended to allow doctors to help in specific situations. The ruling applies to competent adults with enduring, intolerable suffering who clearly consent to ending their lives. The question on the appeal is whether the criminal prohibition violates a person's Charter right to life, liberty and security of the person and to equal treatment under the law. This is a question that asks us to balance competing values of great importance. On the one hand stands the autonomy and dignity of a competent adult who seeks death as a response to a grievous and irremediable medical condition. On the other stands the sanctity of life and the need to protect the vulnerable.

The Court concluded that the prohibition on physician assisted dying is void insofar as it deprives a competent adult of such assistance where (1) the person affected clearly consents to the termination of life; and (2) the person has a grievous and irremediable medical condition (including an illness, disease or disability) that causes enduring suffering that is intolerable to the individual in the circumstances of his or her condition.

The Court has given federal and provincial governments 12 months to craft legislation to respond to the rule; the ban on doctor-assisted suicide stands until then. If the governments don't write a new law,

the court's exemption for physicians will stand. An important discussion must now begin with Canadians and politicians at all levels, with civil society, health professions, the legal community, and people with disabilities. We start from the premise that the lives of Canadians with disabilities are worthy of the utmost respect which must never be taken for granted.

Hard as it is to talk about death and dying, we now must seriously contemplate the changes about to unfold in the wake of this decision. Our elected officials must take notice of the pressing questions that are of urgent concern to Canadians with disabilities. To what extent do conditions of poverty, exclusion and lack of support restrict autonomy and erode the human will to live among dependent Canadians? Will our governments stand firm in maintaining and expanding home care services and supports for community living? Will our national commitment to suicide prevention extend to persons with disabilities and persons with degenerative conditions? Most critically, will access to palliative care become a universally available health care service to provide needed support and choice at the end of life?

In the dialogue to come, we urge respect, openness and assurance that Canadians with disabilities and our representative organizations can fully participate, in full confidence that our experience, voices and knowledge are valued. We seek wise decisions guided by the values of diversity and inclusion that define us and underpin our Canadian society.

To learn more about the Supreme Court Decision, go to www.cbc.ca/news/politics/supreme-court-says-yes-to-doctor-assisted-suicide-in-specific-cases-1.2947487

Early Bird AGM Notice

The ACCD Annual General Meeting is scheduled for May 30th, 2015. Be sure to add this event to your calendar and stay tuned for the full details in the April Action News bulletin.





Alberta Committee of Citizens with Disabilities
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MISSION STATEMENT

The Alberta Committee of Citizens with Disabilities actively promotes full participation in society and provides a voice for Albertans with disabilities.

Board Members Wanted



The Alberta Committee of Citizens with Disabilities is looking for board members in the **NORTHERN** and **SOUTHERN** areas of the province only.

Do you have a disability and would like to make a difference in your community?

- Are you 18 years of age or older and can commit to a 2-year term?
- Do you have ready access to email?
- Are you available for monthly conference calls and face-to-face meetings twice a year?
- Are you familiar with the activities of non-profit organizations, including projects, programs, and resource development?

Why not put your name forward as a potential volunteer to serve on the board of directors of the Alberta Committee of Citizens with Disabilities, a consumer-directed, grassroots organization dedicated to improving the quality of life of Albertans with disabilities?

For more information, please send enquires to the ACCD offices at 780-488-9088, 1-800-387-2514 or email accd@accd.net.

ACCD Dental, Eye Care, & Pharmacy Accessibility Research Initiatives

As you may know, ACCD has initiated a research study on Accessible Dental, Eye Care and Pharmacy Services in Alberta, and we are collecting data using focus groups, accessibility surveys and questionnaires.



Our Questionnaire Surveys are now up and ready to be filled out online. There are two separate questionnaires – one for people

with disabilities/their caregivers/guardians and one for professionals/practitioners/employees from dental, eye care and pharmacy services. Below are the links for both questionnaires. Please fill out the questionnaire that is most relevant to you.

People with disabilities/caregivers/guardians:



https://www.surveymonkey.com/s/for_people_with_disabilities

Dental, eye care and pharmacy professionals/practitioners/employees



https://www.surveymonkey.com/s/for_dental_eyecare_or_pharmacy_professionals

Apply for the Education for Life Bursary

Each year, ACCD provides financial support to full and part-time post-secondary students through our Education for Life Bursary. Students with disabilities who are continuing their education as post-secondary students are eligible for bursaries of up to \$1000. The application deadline for the 2015-2016 year is July 31, 2015. Visit our website, www.accd.net, for full details and application forms.



Please contact ACCD at 780-488-9088 or 1-800-387-2514 if you have any questions.



Together, We Hold the Power!

Full Participation - Accessibility - Equity