



**ASSOCIATION CATHOLIQUES
CANADIENNE DE LA SANTÉ**

**CATHOLIC HEALTH
ASSOCIATION OF CANADA**

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Catholic Health Association of Canada Responds to the Physician-Assisted Suicide of Mr. Austin Bastable

Ottawa — The assisted suicide of Austin Bastable raises critical questions about the meaning of suffering, death, and the responsibility of society to care for those who are dying.

The circumstances of Mr. Bastable's death require all of us to search for better ways in which we as a society can be more caring of those who are sick and dying, said Raymond Lafond, Chairperson of the Catholic Health Association of Canada (CHAC). "Assisted death and euthanasia are ways of avoiding this responsibility to care for those who are suffering."

Current social trends indicate that the need for support, companionship and unconditional care of those who are suffering or nearing death will increase dramatically in the coming decades. In responding to these developments, our society has an important choice to make. Will we put our focus on care-in-dying, attending to the fears and needs that burden the dying, and work to provide quality of life in the period leading up to death, or will we choose aid-in-dying which seeks to end a person's life.

If, as advocated by Mr. Bastable, physician-assisted suicide were to be legalized, it would undermine respect for the dignity of human life and for the dying process. The CHAC holds that human life is intrinsically valuable, possessing an inalienable dignity in all its stages. Care for the dying must include a commitment to alleviate suffering and to ensure that barriers to effective pain management are removed. Proper care for the dying recognizes that the period leading up to death can provide important moments of both personal and communal growth and transformation.

Legalized euthanasia and assisted suicide would have serious impacts. "Telling and teaching doctors that they may kill would undermine the trust between physician and patient and radically change the way we view medicine and the role of doctors." Assisted suicide also ignores a fundamental principle on which our society is founded, namely that we must not kill each other, Mr. Lafond added.

The doctor-assisted suicide of Mr. Bastable challenges all of us involved in health care, and society in general, to take seriously the fears people have about suffering, sickness and death. It also highlights the importance of palliative care in attending to the physical, emotional and spiritual needs of dying patients and their families, and ensuring that effective pain management is provided.

Lafond said that the intent of these comments is in no way to pass just judgement on Mr. Bastable, but to call for deeper reflection on the implications of any legal decision that may be made which would have a profound impact on Canadian society and how we care for those who are dying.

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