



**ASSOCIATION CATHOLIQUES
CANADIENNE DE LA SANTÉ**

**CATHOLIC HEALTH
ASSOCIATION OF CANADA**

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

ASSOCIATION WELCOMES SENATE REPORT

The Special Senate Committee on Euthanasia and Assisted Suicide has produced a very constructive report on these difficult issues, says the Catholic Health Association of Canada (CHAC).

“We entirely support the Committee’s main conclusion that euthanasia and assisted suicide continue to be offences under the Criminal Code. We are also pleased to see that the Committee recommends making palliative care programs a top priority in the restructuring of the health care system,” said Leo Steven, Chairperson of the Board of Directors. Both recommendations are consistent with CHAC’s position which the Association presented to the Senate Committee last fall.

CHAC also welcomes the report’s call for clarifications to the Criminal Code with respect to the withholding and withdrawing of life-support treatment. “Many Canadians may fear they will be given inappropriate life-prolonging treatment against their will or without being consulted. A person’s refusal of treatment or request to discontinue treatment must be respected. There is no obligation to provide treatment when it is of no benefit or when the burden outweighs the benefits hoped for or obtained. The Senators’ recommendation should be acted on by the government in order to eliminate the current ambiguity in the Criminal Code.”

However, the report’s recommendation that the Criminal Code be amended to provide for a less severe penalty in cases where there is compassion or mercy causes serious concern for the Association. “Discretionary sentencing could allow murders to be disguised as ‘compassionate homicides’,” Mr. Steven commented, adding that the deliberate taking of another person’s life, even with their consent and even in the spirit of compassion, threatens the very foundation of society. It gives power to one person over the most fundamental right of another—the right to life itself. “We cannot deliberately take the life of another person or decide that a person’s life is not worth living simply because it differs from ours. This could lead us to consider a killing ‘compassionate’ simply because the victim was disabled, elderly, ill or in pain, or even socially disadvantaged.”

Instead, he said, we must ensure that people receive the kind of care that is appropriate to their condition. “That is why we are pleased to see that the Senate Committee is requesting concrete commitment to more and better palliative care throughout Canada.”

Other recommendations the CHAC presented to the Committee last fall included doing more research to identify the needs of dying patients, their families and caregivers, and making long-term care a greater priority in Canada’s health care system.