

Coalition for HealthCARE and Conscience

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The Problem

Medical Assistance in Dying (MAID) is a controversial procedure that has been permitted by the Supreme Court of Canada and Parliament. Some caregivers believe that it is morally acceptable to end the life of a patient upon request while others do not. Some go further and believe that all caregivers must help willing patients to end their lives prematurely. For example, the College of Physicians and Surgeons (CPSO) requires that conscientiously objecting physicians refer patients for MAID.

The Coalition for HealthCARE and Conscience represents more than 110 healthcare facilities (with almost 18,000 care beds and 60,000 staff) and more than 5,000 physicians across Canada.

Our members come from diverse perspectives, but all agree that taking a patient's life or referring for this procedure violates at least one of the following:

- The Hippocratic Oath;
- Our religious convictions;
- Our mission and values;
- Our professional ethics;
- Our creed; or,
- Our deeply held conviction that healthcare should heal people, not hasten death.

Our position is supported by Evangelical Christian, Roman Catholic and Orthodox Jewish theologians and moral authorities.

Our right to freedom of conscience and religion is enshrined s. 2 of the *Charter of Rights and Freedoms*. Our right to protection against discrimination is enshrined in s.15.

Many other provinces, such as Alberta, have adopted alternatives to effective referral and no other foreign jurisdiction that allows assisted suicide or euthanasia requires effective referral.

CPSO experts insist that conscientiously objecting physicians will have to leave family medicine, palliative care and other specialties and move to a smaller number of specialties like pathology or cosmetic surgery. The CPSO intends to investigate and discipline conscientious objectors.

A prominent Canadian medical ethicist at Queen's University, has advocated for a morals test to be applied to medical school applicants to screen out those with conscientious objections.

The government of Ontario has the opportunity to protect the conscience rights of physicians and other medical professionals by amending Bill 84 to include conscience protection. This would protect health care providers from those who seek to impose an absolute requirement to perform, refer for or assist in MAID. Conscientious objectors need to be able to continue to care for their patients.

The Solution

1. Amend Bill 84 to protect physicians and other health care professionals from being forced to refer for, perform or assist in MAID, or being discriminated against for taking this stand.

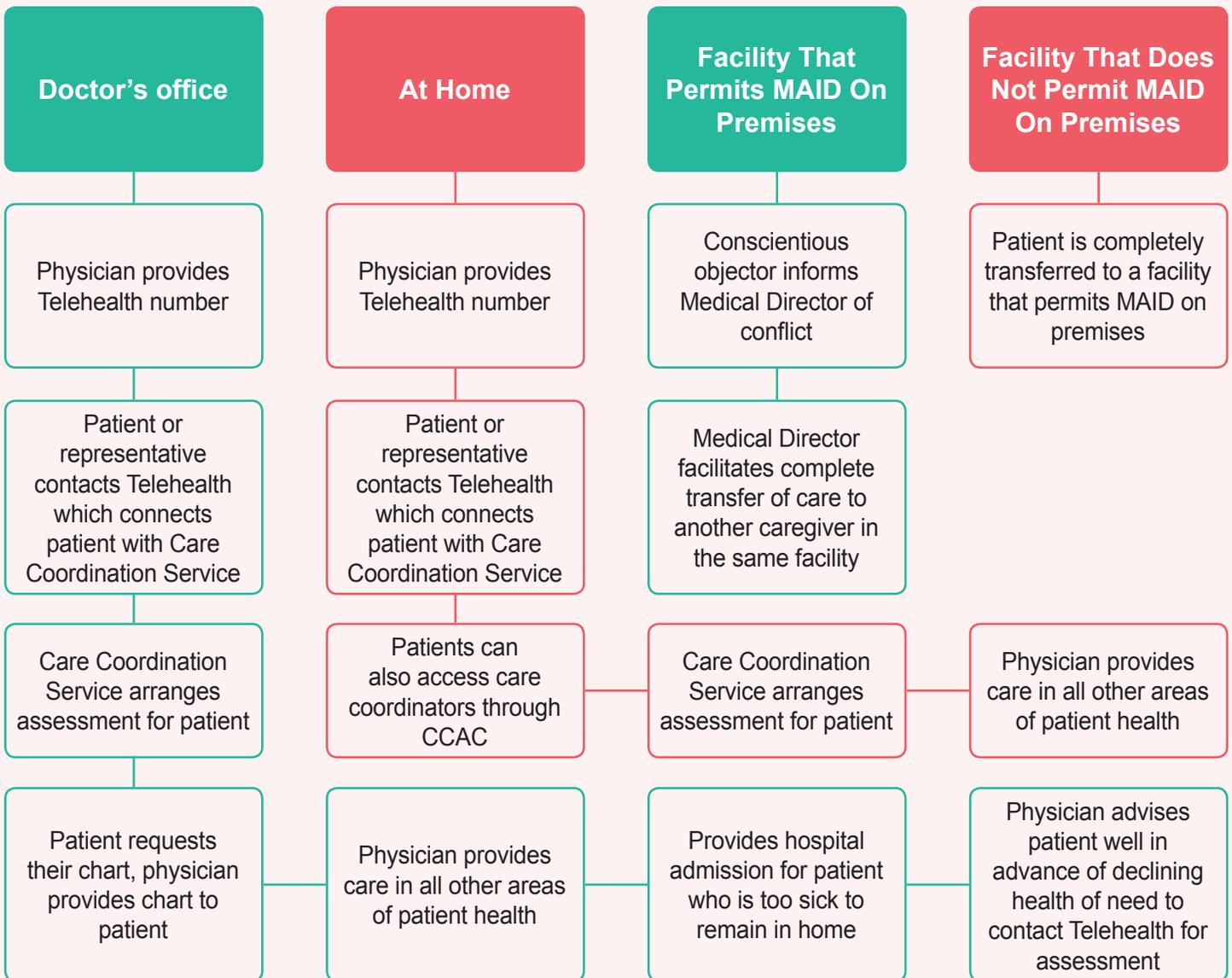
2. Create a Care Coordination Service consistent with the approach of Alberta, which protects both patients and health care workers.

How it can work

When a patient expresses interest in assisted death, the physician will:

- Discuss the source(s) of suffering.
- Identify all options for the patient and how to access them.

Depending on where the patient makes the request, an assessment could be accessed in these different ways.



We appreciate the proposal of the Ministry of Health to create a care coordination service. The requirement to refer however remains problematic. Legislative protection along with implementation

of these strategies would provide patient access while allowing physicians to continue to serve their patients. In order for this to work, conscientious objection must be legally protected.