



October 14, 2021

OFFICIAL STATEMENT FROM SPEECH-LANGUAGE & AUDIOLOGY CANADA (SAC)

Official Statement on Speech-Language Pathology Services in Medical Assistance in Dying

Speech-language pathologists (S-LPs) help physicians and nurse practitioners provide Medical Assistance in Dying (MAID) by supporting people with communication difficulties to understand the information provided and communicate their intended messages.

The *Criminal Code of Canada* allows physicians and nurse practitioners to provide [MAID](#) to eligible competent adults in accordance with specified safeguards. Other healthcare providers, including S-LPs, can help physicians and nurse practitioners provide MAID. S-LPs have a crucial role in supporting people with communication difficulties who wish to access MAID and other [end-of-life care](#) options. *The Criminal Code of Canada* states:

If the person has difficulty communicating, all necessary measures must be taken to provide a reliable means by which the person may understand the information that is provided to them and communicate their decision (Section 241.2(3)(g) and 241.2(3.1)(j)).

S-LPs must understand their scope of practice within the federal legislation and carefully consider all interactions with patients about MAID (Carling, 2018). In addition, S-LPs must be knowledgeable about their provincial or territorial model of care for implementing MAID, as well as guidance issued by the applicable provincial professional regulatory body. The federal legislation does not require any healthcare provider to provide or help to provide MAID. S-LPs who have a conscientious objection to helping to provide MAID must make all reasonable attempts to refer the patient to another S-LP or to provincial or territorial resources.

Speech-language pathology interventions for patients requesting MAID include addressing unmet communication and swallowing needs, facilitating referral to a physician or nurse practitioner, directing the patient to resources, and helping them to understand written materials about MAID. S-LPs may assess communication and cognition prior to MAID eligibility assessments, refer patients to [audiology services](#), participate in capacity assessments, and suggest compensatory communication strategies. They may also provide communication supports to assist patients during their discussions with MAID physicians or nurse practitioners. In addition, S-LPs may offer education



about strategies for accommodating mild communication difficulties to MAID physicians and nurse Lalonde Myers, 2020; Jansen & Buchel, 2018).

Research shows that people with communication difficulties may not be able to access MAID (Downar et al., 2020). S-LPs have a critical role in ensuring patients requesting MAID are able to provide fully informed consent and that the intended messages of patients with communication difficulties are accurately conveyed to their healthcare providers and loved ones.

It is imperative that S-LPs are included in MAID teams to allow for equal access to this end-of-life option for people with communication difficulties.

References

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Jansen, S., & Buchel, C. (2018, November 22). *The Role of the Speech-Language Pathologist and Audiologist in Medical Assistance in Dying* [Webinar]. Speech-Language & Audiology Canada. <https://www.sac-oac.ca/news-events/events/sac-webcast-role-speech-language-pathologists-and-audiologists-medical-assistance>

About SAC

Speech-Language & Audiology Canada (SAC) is a member-driven organization that supports and promotes the professions of more than 6,500 members and associates. We are the only national organization passionately supporting and representing speech-language pathologists, audiologists and communication health assistants inclusively. Through this support, we champion the needs of people with communication disorders. Visit www.sac-oac.ca to learn more.

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