



Medical Assistance in Dying (MAiD)

FAQ for Patients Considering MAiD

Introduction

This handout is for patients at Hamilton Health Sciences (HHS). It provides an overview of MAiD and how to get the process started, if you think this option may be right for you.

1. What is “medical assistance in dying”?

Medical Assistance in Dying (MAiD) is a legal option in Canada that allows you to ask for a medical procedure that will end your life, *if you meet certain conditions*.

MAiD is a very personal decision. Some reasons people choose to have MAiD are:

- Physical or psychological suffering caused by a medical condition that can't be improved
- Decreased ability to do enjoyable things due to the medical condition
- Loss of meaning, purpose or dignity because of the medical condition

2. Could I be eligible for MAiD?

In order to be eligible for MAiD in Canada, you must be assessed by two doctors or nurse practitioners, and meet all of the following legal criteria:

- Over 18 years old
- Have a valid provincial health card or be eligible for provincial health coverage
- Have a serious, incurable medical condition (*Note: Mental illness alone does not qualify a person to receive MAiD currently.*)
- Be experiencing severe physical or psychological suffering that can't be improved in any way you find acceptable.
- Be capable of making your own healthcare decisions
- Be aware of other options to relieve your suffering
- Make this request on your own without pressure from anyone else

3. If I am interested in MAiD, when should I ask for MAiD?

First, consider whether you feel you meet the criteria above. Do you have an incurable condition? Are you suffering? Is your suffering getting worse and becoming unbearable?

Next, consider whether you feel *ready to die within the next 3 months*. MAiD isn't a treatment that

can be given to patients within a few days, because there are several legal steps that need to be completed. However, it also isn't something that can be preplanned months or years in advance, before you are unwell. You cannot write down your wishes for MAiD in an advance care plan, such as a living will.

If you feel you meet the legal criteria, your suffering is worsening, and you feel you will be ready to die within the next few months, it is appropriate to get the MAiD process started.

4. How do I get the MAiD process started?

First, tell your healthcare team that you are wondering about assisted dying as an option. They will discuss all of the options that could help improve your suffering.

If you want to be assessed to see if you might be eligible for MAiD, you need to make a request in writing. Your request form must be signed by one eligible witness.

If you are unable to write, another adult can sign the request form for you. Once signed, this request form should be given to your healthcare team so they can get the process started.

You can find the Patient Request for Medical Assistance in Dying form (called a "Clinician Aid A") at <http://www.health.gov.on.ca/en/pro/programs/maid/default.aspx>

5. How will I know if I am eligible for MAiD?

Only doctors and nurse practitioners can assess whether you are eligible. Once you submit your Patient Request for MAiD form, and you are ready to start the process, you will have **two** assessments with two different doctors or nurse practitioners, with help from other members of the healthcare team. Both of the doctors or nurse practitioners will have to agree that you meet the legal criteria. If one of the assessors feels you do not meet the criteria, you may ask to be assessed by someone else.

6. What happens in a MAiD assessment?

Assessments usually take 1-2 hours. There is no formal "test" that you have to pass. The doctor or nurse practitioner will review your health record and then talk with you about your medical situation, your values and goals, and your wish to receive MAiD. They will make sure you understand all of your care options and that MAiD is the right choice for you. Sometimes these conversations take place over multiple meetings. You may choose to have family or friends present in the assessment with you. However, the doctor or nurse practitioner must speak with you privately at some point in the conversation.

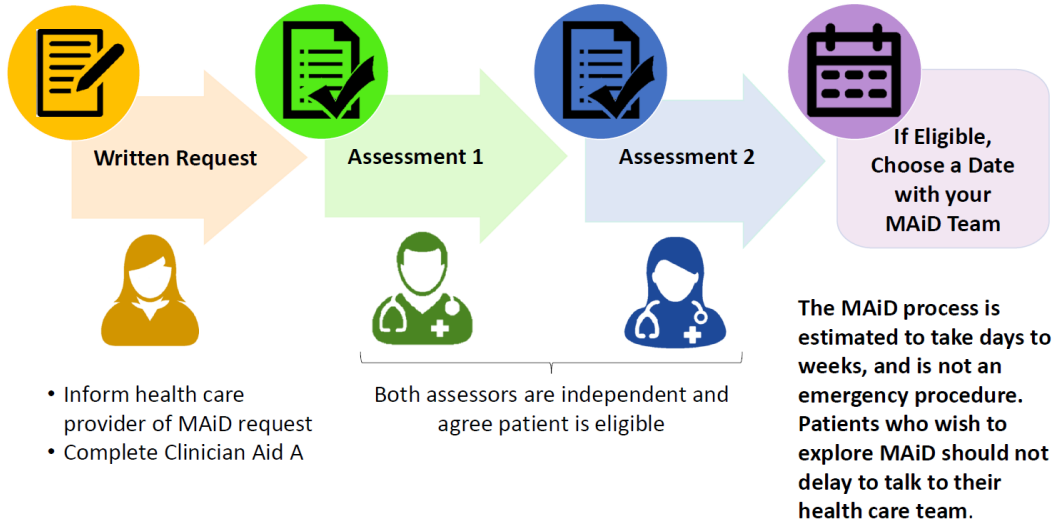
7. Do I have to inform my family about my wish for MAiD?¹

Many patients want to involve their families and loved ones as they explore the option of MAiD. However, the decision to receive MAiD is yours alone. If it is difficult to talk with your family for any reason, you can ask for help from your healthcare team, such as social workers, spiritual care providers, or others. If there is a family member you don't want to be

¹ Family is defined as anyone important to the patient.

told about your request for MAiD, the healthcare team will keep that information confidential.

8. What are the steps in the process? How long does the process take?



Infographic adapted from ADRAT, William Osler Health System

There are two “Tracks” for MAiD with slightly different rules to support and protect individuals exploring MAiD as an option. The MAiD team who responds to your request will determine which Track you belong to:

- Track 1: patients with a “Reasonably Foreseeable Natural Death” (that is, their medical conditions are expected to lead to natural death within the near future). It may take 1-3 weeks to arrange the two MAiD assessments. If found eligible, these patients often can receive MAiD *within a few weeks* after completing their Clinician Aid A.
- Track 2: patients with “No Reasonably Foreseeable Natural Death” (that is, their medical conditions are not expected to lead to a natural death within a the near future). These patients have a longer and more complex assessment process that can take many months. (See Question 15)

9. Who is involved in providing assisted dying at HHS?

Not all healthcare providers are comfortable providing MAiD. HHS has created an Assisted Dying Resource and Assessment Service (ADRAS) team to provide MAiD to our patients. ADRAS is a team of health care professionals, including doctors, nurses, social workers, spiritual care providers and others. The role of this team is to support patients/families and their healthcare teams through the MAiD process. The ADRAS team will be contacted through your healthcare team if you choose to explore MAiD.

This MAiD team also has a care coordinator who helps to organize the patient's MAiD assessments and care planning.

10. Can I change my mind?

Yes, you can change your mind at any time, for any reason. Simply tell a member of your healthcare team. If you change your mind about MAiD, you will continue to receive other care.

Throughout the process healthcare team members will ask you several times if you still wish to receive assisted dying. This is to ensure you are certain that MAiD is right for you.

11. Where can I have MAiD? Can I have family and friends with me when I die?

HHS patients can receive assisted dying in hospital and at home (this includes retirement homes and long-term care homes). Your healthcare team will help you decide what is best for you if you choose to proceed with MAiD.

You can have anyone you choose with you when you receive MAiD. You should discuss this with them in advance to make sure they are willing to be present at your death. The healthcare team will help prepare you and them.

12. Will MAiD be listed on my death certificate?

No. The cause of death will be your underlying medical condition(s), e.g., cancer, ALS, congestive heart failure, etc.

13. When should I contact the ADRAS team?

If you are in hospital you can contact

ADRAS through your clinical team.

If you are not in hospital, your referral to ADRAS must be done through your clinical team. Contact your physician to let them know you are interested in exploring the option of MAiD.

If you are being followed by the ADRAS team, and you feel there is a change in your medical condition or you would like to change your timeline for MAiD, or you have questions/concerns about the process, please email the MAiD Care Coordinator at adras@hpsc.ca or call 905-521-2100 ext 12389.

Please note that the voicemail for this phone number and the email address are only checked Monday to Friday during regular business hours and should be contacted for MAiD care only. If you are in distress, please contact someone from your medical team or go to the nearest emergency room.

14. Who takes care of my medical needs while I am exploring the option of MAiD?

The ADRAS team ONLY takes care of the MAiD process for you. All other care will be provided by your usual medical team. In the hospital this will include the care team on your unit. If you are at home, this will include your primary care physician, specialists and/or palliative care team.

If your pain, symptoms and overall condition are getting worse, contact the healthcare team caring for you as soon as possible. You may benefit from different medications or treatments to help you feel more comfortable; your healthcare team can help you understand your options for care. If you are experiencing a medical emergency, call 911 for help.

15. What if I am interested in MAiD but I don't have a medical condition that will cause my natural death soon, that is I am a "Track 2" patient?

Only a qualified healthcare professional can determine whether a person requesting MAiD is Track 1 or 2. If you have been told you are a "Track 2" patient, that means a member of the ADRAS Team has reviewed your medical information and decided your current medical conditions are not expected to cause your natural death in the near future.

In addition to the usual MAiD process, there are some additional legal safeguards or requirements for you to be eligible for MAiD:

- Your case must be reviewed by a medical specialist with expertise in your condition. Sometimes this means the MAiD team will ask for additional medical consultations or tests. You may need to meet some new doctors and have additional tests to ensure you fully understand your medical situation and treatment choices.
- You must be offered a variety of supports, including: care for your pain and symptoms (called "palliative care"); counselling services; and disability supports. You can refuse these other supports, but it is important that you know about them.
- Your MAiD process will take a minimum of 90-days; this is so you and your healthcare team can take time to explore all options to relieve your suffering. Your 90-day period begins when the first doctor or nurse practitioner who finds you eligible starts your assessment process. The MAiD coordinator will tell you this date so you know when the process started. Because Track 2 cases are often complex and take time, you may have to wait several months before a MAiD assessor will be assigned to you. You will be contacted by the ADRAS team when a MAiD assessor becomes available.

While waiting for this to happen, you should continue to work with your care team to plan for your ongoing care. Consider trying the treatments recommended by your care team. They may improve your symptoms or at least prevent them from getting worse while you are waiting to be assessed for MAiD.

Resources:

For information about the MAiD law and process:

- Ontario Ministry of Health and Long-Term Care MAiD Resources: <https://www.ontario.ca/page/medical-assistance-dying-and-end-life-decisions>

To connect with Palliative Care support at home:

- Community Palliative Care:
 - Hamilton Palliative Care Outreach team: 289-919-1165
- Hospital Palliative Care
 - Hamilton Health Sciences Palliative Care: <https://www.hamiltonhealthsciences.ca/areas-of-care/palliative-care/>

For support for patients and families going through the MAiD process:

- Bridge C-14: <https://www.bridgoc14.org/>
- MAiD Family Support Society: <https://maidfamilysupport.ca/>