



Protect Your Rights and Wishes as a Patient

Know your rights. By learning about your rights as a patient, you can take greater control of your care and make informed decisions about treatments and medical procedures.

As a patient in Canada, you have the following rights and options:

- The right to health care services without discrimination based on grounds set out in the applicable human rights code, or rights under the Canadian Charter of Rights and Freedoms.** Under this system, Canadian residents have reasonable access to medically necessary hospital and health care services without paying out-of-pocket. (Health care laws and procedures may vary by location).
- The right to informed consent – to understand your health condition and the treatments available to you.** You cannot be forced to undergo medical treatment without your informed consent, except during an emergency situation (eg. cardiopulmonary resuscitation). Your health care provider has both a professional and a legal duty to involve you in decisions about your health care, and to obtain consent from you – or from your Substitute Decision Maker in the event of your incapacity – before treatment (subject to care in an emergency).
- The right to a second opinion.** Making important decisions about treatment requires trust and honesty between you and your health care provider. If you are unsure, have doubts, or just want further information or assessments regarding a health matter, you can ask for a second opinion. *You always have the right to change your mind about the chosen treatment.*
- The right to have your Advance Directive or prior capable wishes respected.** You have the right to express and document your wishes for your future care and to have those wishes followed, provided they are clearly stated, within the current law, and appropriate to your medical condition. Regulations vary by province and territory. <https://www.dyingwithdignity.ca/education-resources/advance-care-planning-kit/>
- The right to have the authority of your Substitute Decision-Maker (SDM) recognized.** Choosing your SDM is one of the most important decisions you will make. This is the person legally empowered to make health care decisions for you if you do not have the capacity to do so (e.g. you are in a coma, or you have dementia). Your SDM does not need to be a family member. An SDM is known as an Agent in Alberta.
- The right to accept, refuse or discontinue medical treatments, and to change our mind at any time.** You can stop treatment at any stage of your health care after you've started, even if such refusal or withdrawal proves detrimental to your health or leads to your death. Your health care provider must respect your informed decision to stop treatment. Legally, there is no difference between discontinuing a treatment that has already started and refusing it in the first place.

- ❑ **The right to decline cardiopulmonary resuscitation (CPR) – in accordance with a do-not-resuscitate (DNR) order.** A formal DNR order must be obtained through your health care provider in accordance with the specific requirements of your province or territory. The DNR order instructs other health care providers to withhold CPR if your heart stops beating. In Alberta The Goals of Care Document in the Green Sleeve can address this issue.
- ❑ **The right to palliative care** (including palliative sedation) if it is appropriate for your condition. Palliative care focuses on both pain management and optimizing quality of life. A person does not need to be dying or to be in the final stages of an illness to benefit from a palliative care approach, although eligibility for palliative care may vary by location. Palliative care and medical assistance in dying (MAID) are not mutually exclusive. A person pursuing MAID may also receive palliative care and vice versa. However, the final provision of MAID is currently prohibited in some faith based hospitals, hospices and care facilities.
- ❑ **The right to refuse nutrition and hydration by artificial means or any other aspects of health care.** People who wish to allow their life to end naturally sometimes refuse or discontinue care, which includes health care to prevent or cure illness. This may be referred to as voluntary stopping of care (VSC). This commonly involves voluntarily stopping or refusing oral food or drink (VSED) .
- ❑ **The right to pain and symptom management.** You have the right to be kept comfortable, even if the necessary medications will hasten the dying process.
- ❑ **The right to receive medical assistance in dying (MAID).** Since 2016 Medical Assistance in Dying has been legal in Canada if you request it and you meet the eligibility criteria outlined in Bill C 14 and Bill C 7. <https://www.dyingwithdignity.ca/education-resources/maid-assessment-guide/>
- ❑ **The right to see, obtain copies, and correct the information in your own health (medical) records.**

Planning now for end of life care is the best way to ensure the treatment you want and the peace of mind you need:

1. Reflect upon and discuss your wishes.
2. Make your decisions based on the options available to you.
3. Document your wishes in clear written instructions in your Personal Directive.
4. Communicate your choices and ensure that your substitute decision-maker (SDM), known as an agent in Alberta, has a copy and understands your wishes fully.
5. Carry a medic alert wallet card.
6. Create an In Case of Emergency (ICE) contact in your cell phone. Health care providers are trained to look for this.
7. Keep your Green Sleeve and Goals of Care Designation Order on or near your fridge.