



## Improving Access to Palliative Care

Health Canada defines palliative care as a “multi-disciplinary approach to healthcare for individuals and families who are living with a life-threatening disease. Regardless of the diagnosis or stage of illness, palliative care focuses on improving quality of life through the prevention and relief of physical, psychosocial and spiritual suffering, with treatment plans tailored to the needs of the patient and their family. Palliative care can involve: pain management; social, psychological, emotional and spiritual support; and caregiver support.”

Unfortunately, high-quality palliative care services are accessible to fewer than 30 percent of Canadians. Even where appropriate palliative care policies and procedures are in place, there is still a lack of resources, training and access that limits provision of care. Nearly a quarter of all costs associated with palliative care are borne by families.

Canadians nearing death should be entitled to the full range of palliative care options to relieve suffering and sustain dignity.

On June 14, 2016, CIJA joined representatives from various faith communities in a united call for all levels of government to resolve this pressing issue, including initiatives to:

- Develop a pan-Canadian palliative and end-of-life care strategy to address the need for high quality care for all Canadians;
- Increase the availability and accessibility of essential hospice and palliative care services in all settings;
- Improve the quality and consistency of palliative and end-of-life care;
- Provide more support for family caregivers, in the form of flexible financial and tax benefits; and
- Ensure that the healthcare system respects the psychosocial and spiritual needs of patients and their families.

We are encouraged by the Government of Canada’s commitment to allocate \$3 billion in support of palliative and home care. There is urgent

need for coordination with the provinces to ensure that these funds flow quickly and efficiently and that, regardless of the means or place of residence of patients, all measures are taken to ensure access.

Given that seniors are the fastest growing population in Canada, there will be an even greater demand in the future for end-of-life care. Greater access to palliative care would likely result in a more cost-effective allocation of healthcare resources, providing an additional imperative to address this issue quickly and comprehensively.

Canadians nearing death should be entitled to the full range of palliative care options to relieve suffering and sustain dignity. As the interfaith statement noted, “Compassion is a foundational element of Canadian identity, and it is accordingly incumbent on our elected officials at all levels of government to support a robust, well-resourced, national palliative care strategy.”

### KEY POINTS

- Palliative care focuses on improving quality of life through the prevention and relief of physical, psychosocial and spiritual suffering.
- High-quality palliative care services are accessible to fewer than 30 percent of Canadians.
- We are encouraged by the Government of Canada’s commitment to allocate \$3 billion in support of palliative and home care.
- It is incumbent on our elected officials at all levels of government to support a robust, well-resourced, national palliative care strategy.
- Canadians nearing death should be entitled to the full range of palliative care options to relieve suffering and sustain dignity.