

## **International Profiles Assisted Dying / Suicide**

In the 2015 debate in the Scottish parliament on this topic, Alison McInness, Lib Dem MSP, explained why state assisted suicide is both dangerous and unfair.

“I come to this debate as a liberal and as a humanist. I do not accept that there is a right to die..... autonomy (personal choice) is not absolute – we are not entitled to exercise freedom that undermines or endangers the freedom of others..... we need to have choice with responsibility.”

“...in vulnerable people’s minds, the right to die will become a duty to die..... the state must not sanction assisted suicide. In elevating the status of individual autonomy, we reduce the status of those who are dependant. Allowing assisted suicide would, over time, change the way we view and treat the elderly, the disabled, and the infirm.”

### **Canada**

Since 2016, Canada's Medical Assistance in Dying programme (MAID) has been available for adults with terminal illnesses.

In 2021, the MAID law was changed to include those with serious and chronic physical conditions, even if those conditions were non-life threatening.

By 2022, 4.1% of all deaths (13,241) in Canada were MAID deaths, doubling from 2% in 2019. MAID is expected to expand once again in 2024 to include Canadians with mental illness.

In Canada the poor and vulnerable are being offered assisted suicide or euthanasia instead of social care. Canadian Federal Minister for Disability Inclusion, Carla Qualtrough, has said: “In some places in our country, it’s easier to access MAiD [Medical Assistance in Dying] than it is to get a wheelchair.”

Kathrin Mentler, a 37-year-old Vancouver woman suffering with depression, who has been told that she will need to wait a long time to see a psychiatrist, has been offered euthanasia as an alternative.

A person with anorexia may qualify for Medical Assistance in Dying if they refuse treatment and their death is considered ‘reasonably foreseeable’ owing to malnourishment.

Hospices in Canada that refuse to offer assisted deaths have had their funding stopped.

### **Netherlands**

In the Netherlands, in 30 years, the country has moved from euthanasia of people who are terminally ill to euthanasia of those who are chronically ill and from physical illness to mental illness. Moreover, cases in the Netherlands include suffering from an accumulation of old-age disorders, for example, sight and hearing disorders, osteoporosis, osteoarthritis, and cognitive decline.

***Prof Leo Boer, a professor of ethics, said in 2019..... there have been important changes in the way the law is applied. We have put in motion something that we have now discovered has more consequences than we ever imagined***

As people got used to the new law, the number of Dutch people being euthanised began to rise sharply, from under 2,000 in 2007 to almost 6,600 in 2017. Also, in 2017, some 1,900 Dutch people killed themselves, while the number of people who died under palliative sedation – hit an astonishing 32,000.

In 2022 the number of deaths by euthanasia or assisted suicide rose nearly 14% to a total of 8,720 including 288 people with dementia and 115 people with severe psychiatric illness. In 2023 it reported that several people with autism and intellectual disabilities had been legally euthanised because they said they could not lead normal lives.

**Prof Boer in 2023 said** “After years of relative stability and increasing transparency in the early 2000s, which made us all very happy, the numbers [of euthanasia deaths] are now rising significantly year after year. **In the past 20 years, the numbers have quadrupled and... in some neighbourhoods assisted deaths account for between 15% and 20% of all deaths.**”

The suicide rate in the UK is 8.4 per 100,000. In Oregon, it is 18.3. In the Netherlands, suicides increased by 40% between 2007 and 2016.

## **Belgium**

In Belgium, in 2014, the law was extended to include terminally ill children of any age, entailing a shift from voluntary to non-voluntary killing – as it is not possible for a baby to give consent. Furthermore, in Belgium, 10 per cent of children who die before their first birthday die as a result of a euthanasia procedure. Belgium permits people with depression, bipolar disorder, schizophrenia, and autism to be euthanised.

Instead of suicide prevention, state assisted suicide promotes suicide completion. Belgian Euthanasia Commission has chillingly noted that “failed suicide attempts have made the people concerned aware that there was also another, more dignified way of ending one’s life.”

In Belgium, a review of involuntary euthanasia by R. Cohen-Almagor was published in the Journal of Medical Ethics in 2015. It found that 1 in 60 deaths occurred without the patient’s explicit request. It was more common in the elderly, those in a coma and those with dementia.

## **Oregon**

Oregon offers assisted suicide to people for the following: anorexia, arthritis, blood disease, complications from a fall, hernia, kidney failure, and musculoskeletal disorders.

In Oregon, the poorest – those who rely on state health insurance – are being offered assisted suicide instead of healthcare. In 2008, Oregon resident Barbara Wagner was seeking chemotherapy treatment to fight advanced lung cancer. The Oregon Health Plan refused to pay \$4,000 per month because it wasn’t within its narrow guidelines of appropriate treatment. It did, however, offer to pay \$50 for Mrs Wagner to receive a lethal cocktail of drugs to end her life.

In Oregon, in 2020, 53 per cent of patients listed being a burden as a reason to end their lives. The suicide rate in Oregon increased by 35% between 2001 and 2018 and was 35% higher than the US national average. In Oregon, only 13% of those who underwent an assisted death were referred for specialist palliative care input.

## **Switzerland**

From CarenotKilling 30/6/23:..... the Health and Social Care Select Committee – which is conducting an inquiry into “assisted dying/assisted suicide” – heard oral evidence from witnesses from Switzerland, including representatives of assisted suicide organisations Dignitas and EXIT (Deutsche Schweiz). *The Telegraph reported*: ‘*Silvan Luley, a team member from Dignitas, gave evidence to MPs... [saying] “it’s about time” that the UK legalises the practice... Asked about whether people who are mentally ill have the capacity to make such a decision, he replied: “Nobody needs to prove that they are competent, but the other way around.”*’

NOTE: All extracts above sourced from CarenotKilling or Catholic Parliamentary Office Briefing material.