Once you are deemed eligible for medical assistance in dying, you can begin to make some plans for medical assistance in dying. You can stop or put the process “on hold” at any time. Be patient and gentle with yourself and loved ones as you explore your wishes related to your death. Times of great love and togetherness will be mixed with times of deep sadness which is normal anticipatory grief.

Some people keep planning simple; selecting the date, time, location and who will be present, while others include more details outlined in our “Planning Checklist”. Do what is right for you and be flexible and open to changes so if the original plans no longer feel “right” or “possible”, allow yourself to revise the plan. The Provincial MAID Program can support you and your family in planning and preparing for medical assistance in dying. Please keep in mind that the date and time of provision needs to be organized with the Provincial MAID Program to ensure that requests can be honored. A funeral home must be identified prior to provision.

It can be helpful to have someone who is aware of all your wishes, to help organize and prepare the space on the day of your provision. They could assist with seating, meals, setting up music, or whatever is important to you. If your location is other than your home, the Provincial MAID Program can assist with communicating with the facility to support your needs and wishes.

### On the Day of Your Medical Assistance in Dying Provision

The day of your provision will bring with it many emotions, feelings, thoughts for you and your family as you prepare for death. Each person will have their own individual experience of being present at the death. It is important for everyone to be kind and patient with each other. There is no “correct” response and you may have a range of emotions including feeling anxious, tearful, angry, relieved, sad, peace, restless and love; these responses are natural. It is okay to feel your feelings – it is okay to have tears or not. Focusing on breathing in your body can sometimes help support you to be present.

Flexibility to do what is right in the moment is key. Family, who choose to be present in the room, may leave after death, while others may want to stay for a longer time. You may also feel that you need to step out of the room for a moment – remember if you do, you can quietly return at any time. Everyone needs to make their own decision as to what is right for them in the moment.

Sometimes family are unable to be present for the death. Whether you are outside the room, a different city, a different country, this distance does not diminish your ability to have meaningful connection and closeness through the spirit, and love for each other. Technology also allows ways to participate without being physically present. The Provincial MAID Program can support you in exploring possible options.
What to Expect at Provision

Before Provision Occurs:
The Provincial MAID Program will arrive 30 to 60 minutes in advance of your provision. The Social Worker may also attend to offer support to you, your family, and the team. The nurse practitioner or physician will confirm your identity and ensure safeguards are in place. An IV will be started for the medication. After consent is obtained the Provincial MAID Program will step away to prepare the medications which takes approximately 10 minutes. This will allow final private time together including any special cultural, ceremonial, or rituals related to death. If more time is needed please let the team know.

The right to change your mind:
Remember you, the patient, have the right to change your mind right up until the moment before medications are given. You can either withdraw your request completely or change it to a later date.

The final moments before death:
You may wish to sit close to your loved one including lying or sitting on their bed, cuddling, holding hands or touching them – whatever feels right for you. Most patients lose consciousness quickly once the first medication is given. Families tell us they are often not prepared for how quickly this happens. Any final goodbyes to each other (thank you, I love you, I will miss you or a kiss or hug) should be expressed just before the first medication is started while your loved-one is awake. You may wish to continue to talk to your loved-one even after consciousness is lost. It is said that hearing is the last sense to leave the body. Do what feels right for you in the moment. Again remember, there is no right or wrong way.

The administration of Medical Assistance in Dying:
There are four medications given over approximately 5 minutes; this will be briefly reviewed with the patient and family prior to starting administration. Between each medication, the IV line must be flushed with a saline solution. Most patients fall asleep and lose consciousness quickly and death usually occurs within minutes. There may be breathing changes such as deep breaths and snoring which is normal. On rare occasions a second IV may need to be started and a second set of medications given.

What you may experience:
The final leave-taking can be a difficult time. Some family may choose to leave the room, while others may wish to spend time with the body, attending to special rituals, reminiscing and saying good-bye. You will continue to feel many different emotions as you begin to experience the reality of your loved one’s death. Express your feelings in whatever way feels right remembering this experience is unique for everyone. Be kind and supportive to each other. Everyone is doing their best in the moment.
What to expect at the moment of death – physical changes:
Although you may be prepared, experiencing the death may be difficult. There are some normal physical signs and changes:

- Many people will snore as they first start falling asleep; this does not mean they are distressed or otherwise suffering.
- The muscles in the body will relax.
- The eyelids may remain slightly open and the eyes will appear fixed with no movement or blinking.
- The jaw relaxes and the mouth may open.
- The skin colour changes becoming pale or yellow.
- The body temperature changes and the person will feel cool to touch.
- Breathing and the heartbeat has stopped.
- The physician or nurse practitioner will confirm death has occurred.

What to Expect After Medical Assistance in Dying – For Friends and Family

- The Provincial MAID Program will leave the room to allow family time with their loved one’s body to attend to important rituals, final goodbyes and comforting each other.
- Once you are ready a health care team member may remove medical devices such as needles, catheter, hearing aids and any jewelry that is not meant to stay with the person.
- Response times for the funeral transfer team can vary. If you wish a longer waiting period to be with your loved one, please let the Provincial MAID Program know.
- Discussions to contact the funeral home will occur prior to provision with the Provincial MAID Program.
- When the funeral home attendants arrive, they will move the body to a stretcher in preparation for leaving. The body will be placed in a special shroud made for the purpose of transport. Consider whether you wish to be present when the person’s body is removed.
- A “Medical Certificate of Death” will be given to the funeral home. The certificate will identify “drug toxicity” as the first cause of death and the medical conditions/diagnosis that made the patient eligible for medical assistance in dying as the second cause of death. There is no requirement for an autopsy or coroner.
- The funeral home completes a registration of death with Vital Statistics which is required for legal and financial affairs.
- The Provincial MAID Program will check in with family prior to leaving.
- At home, family can spend time with their loved one and attend to any special rituals. A Provincial MAID Program member will stay until the funeral home arrives if the family makes this request.

The Provincial MAID Program is here to support you by calling toll free 1-833-473-6243 (MAID).
If You Wish to Consider Making an Organ Donation or Donation of Your Body

Organ Donation:
Organ donation may be possible following medical assistance in dying. If you are interested in further information, please contact the Saskatchewan Health Authority Donation Program, St. Paul’s Hospital at 1-306-655-0593 or call switchboard at 306-655-5000 and ask for the donation coordinator on call.

Donation of Body:
There are several medical reasons that make it impossible to accept a bequeathal. Determination of acceptance depends upon cause of death, condition of the body at the time of death as well as some operational restrictions. Please visit the FAQ page for a more complete list of reasons: Frequently Asked Questions. The Body Bequeathal Program can be reached by telephone at: 306-966-4075

Family Experiences of Medical Assistance in Dying

Some people feel that a medically assisted death respected their loved one’s wishes (they got to decide how and when to die); felt relief that their loved one’s suffering was over and that they died with dignity. They felt more prepared for the death by having time to talk through important issues with their loved one’s circle of friends and family, tell stories, resolve conflicts, celebrate, complete important tasks, say goodbye and appreciate the person prior to death.

If You or Your Loved Ones Would Like to Provide Feedback

The Provincial MAID Program is patient-focused, family-centered and is committed to providing exceptional end of life care. A key source of learning is to receive important feedback from patients and families about what we are doing well and what we can improve upon.

Feedback is welcomed any time and will not impact the quality of your care or your ability to receive medical assistance in dying. We want you to tell us about your concerns right away. We will do our best to resolve them to support a better experience for you and your family.

Please feel free to contact the Provincial MAID Program Social Worker or Manager by calling toll free 1-833-473-6243 (MAID).

Acknowledgement:

The Provincial MAID Program would like to acknowledge the great work of the following programs from which this information has been adapted.

4. Canadian Virtual Hospice Articles and Resources.