

Wednesday, April 13th, 2016

GROWING SUPPORT FOR VULNERABLE PERSONS STANDARD REFLECTS THE DIVERSITY OF CANADIAN SOCIETY

As more and more Canadians express their support for the [Vulnerable Persons Standard](#), it is apparent that concerns for the protection of vulnerable persons come from a diverse spectrum of Canadian society.

Today, Reverend Stan McKay, a member of the Fisher River Cree Nation in Manitoba and former Moderator of the United Church of Canada, described the importance of the Vulnerable Persons Standard to Canada's Indigenous peoples:

"The development of safeguards for physician-assisted death is a topic that is very important for us as indigenous peoples. We are frequently marginalized and disempowered, so members of our communities can be very vulnerable, whether we are patients, family members or caregivers.

As indigenous people, we are often taught that community rights are to be held in balance with individual rights. For this reason, I personally support the Vulnerable Persons Standard and recognize the importance of this initiative for indigenous peoples who are vulnerable because of disability or other social condition."

Understanding the links between vulnerability and the social determinants of health is at the heart of the Vulnerable Persons Standard. Dr. Stephen Hwang, an Advisor to the Standard, is Director of the Centre for Research on Inner City Health at St. Michael's Hospital and Chair in Homelessness, Housing and Health at the University of Toronto. Dr. Hwang expressed his support for the

Standard in the following terms:

"People who are homeless and marginalized often have many unmet health, social, and spiritual needs, even at the best of times. The Vulnerable Persons Standard is critical to ensuring that physician-assisted dying is never a substitute for tireless efforts to address the needs of homeless people who are approaching the end of life."

As documented in a recent [research paper](#) from the Canadian Association for Community Living, Canadian seniors are increasingly made vulnerable by barriers to preventive, acute and palliative health care, and to depression, violence and all forms of abuse. Ms. Doreen McKenzie-Sanders, Member of the Order of Canada and Journalist emeritus, captured the urgency of these concerns in her endorsement of the Standard:

"As a 95-year-old vulnerable person, I support the Vulnerable Persons Standard unequivocally. I have personally experienced, and observed from the elderly around me, what growing old and vulnerable can entail both physically and emotionally. My recent experience in intensive hospital care, hospice stay, and now long term care has made me acutely aware of the complex and dangerous implications of physician-assisted death."

The safeguards set out in the Vulnerable Persons Standard are imperative to the protection of those of us who are vulnerable but whose concerns are not always heard."

Concern for the safety and constitutional rights of vulnerable Canadians is not a "special interest" issue. The experience of vulnerability is not confined to any single social group. All persons - especially those who are marginalized - will be vulnerable when they are not valued or respected or supported within their communities, or within Canadian society at large.

DID YOU KNOW?

Not all Canadians enjoy the protections of food and housing security; adequate income, access to education and healthcare; caring family and friends; laws and policies that protect us and promote our interests. Research demonstrates that people who have less access to these defences - often referred to as the social determinants of health - are more vulnerable to illness, suffering, and

reduced life expectancy. Psychosocial factors, including grief, loneliness, stigma and shame may also contribute to a person's vulnerability.

Vulnerability can compromise autonomy in ways that are often difficult to detect. A person who is vulnerable may be induced or coerced to request an assisted death, which is why it is essential to address this risk with a Vulnerable Persons Standard.

IN THE NEWS:

- A network of Canadian physicians has released two highly informative five-minute videos describing their proposed framework for physician-assisted death. One is designed for a wide public audience: [Protecting Vulnerable Persons](#). A second, more detailed version is aimed for policymakers: [A Federal Program for Physician-Hastened Death](#).
 - Commentary by Trudo Lemmens: [Canadians Support a More Prudent Approach to Medical-Aid-in-Dying than Parliamentary Committee, and Rightly So](#)
 - Radio interview with Dr. Catherine Ferrier: [Physician-Assisted Death - the Roy Green Show](#)
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The Vulnerable Persons Standard was developed by a group of more than forty advisors with expertise in medicine, ethics, law, public policy and needs of vulnerable persons. The Standard is a series of evidence-based safeguards intended to help ensure that Canadians requesting assistance from physicians to end their life can do so without jeopardizing the lives of vulnerable persons who may be subject to coercion and abuse.

To learn more about the Standard and the many Canadians and organizations endorsing the Standard, please visit us at www.vps-npv.ca.

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