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I work for Spinal Cord injury Canada, founded in 1945 by WWII veterans. Veterans who came back home to a country that expected very little of them. Veterans who dismissed the idea that they would be shut away in convalescent homes. Our founders fought in battles overseas and then again back home to prove their lives were worth living.

In fact, 13 of our founders received the Order of Canada – because of what they did after the war. But apparently, 72 years later people with spinal cord injuries still need to fight to prove that their lives are worth living. It’s tiring fighting for existence, but here we are.

I have worked in our SCI federation for 33 of those 72 years. Our organizations across the country support people as they adjust, adapt and thrive while living with a spinal cord injury.

I have fielded requests for support for half my life.

My experience as the past Chief Executive Officer of SCI Ontario and the present Executive Director of SCI Canada have provided me with a distinct expertise to talk about MAiD and its potential impact on people with spinal cord injuries.

I’m here to speak to you on two issues:

- The 90-day wait period.
- The lack of real choice for a person when they are offered MAiD

The 90-day wait period is arbitrary. There are very good reasons – especially related to people with spinal cord injuries – why this wait period should be longer:

- A recent study found that 50% of respondents with a spinal cord injury had suicidal ideation in their first two years post-injury.¹
- Another study found that after the first-year post injury, more than 70% of people rated their life equal to, or better than, life pre-injury.²
- CI know from my work that it can take anywhere from several months up to seven years or more – for a person to mourn their loss and accept their new life.
- Rehabilitation, court battles, finding accessible housing and possible work retraining can take years

Sustaining a spinal cord injury is a huge life change. While lying in bed in acute care or in rehab, a person does not possibly have all the information needed to make a life-or-death choice. And as you all know, it takes time to think about all the options. Listen to people’s views. Understand what resources are available – and what is not.

A 90-day wait is not a safeguard for the 4000 or more people with a new spinal cord injury in Canada each year. Imagine the loss to our society if we allow our fellow citizens to make an impulsive, uninformed decision during the early stages of rebuilding a life worth living. Which one of these people could have been our next Order of Canada recipient?

My second concern is that people do not have a real choice when they request MAiD.

When a person discusses MAiD with a doctor, they should also be offered other choices such as:

- home services

¹ Usta Sağlam, Nazife Gamze, et al. “Suicidal ideation, post-traumatic stress disorder, and depression in traumatic spinal cord injury: What resilience tells us.” *The Journal of Spinal Cord Medicine* 46.2 (2023): 309-316.

² Noreau, Luc, et al. "Spinal cord injury community survey: a national, comprehensive study to portray the lives of Canadians with spinal cord injury." *Topics in spinal cord injury rehabilitation* 20.4 (2014): 249-264.

- long-term care
- basic living funds
- suicide prevention
- psychiatric services
- safe, accessible, affordable housing

If these services are not offered or offered but actually not available because of a waitlist, or they are too expensive, or they are too far away, then the person isn't really being offered a choice, are they? The person is in fact being denied a choice. It is MAiD or nothing.

Many people with a disability suffer because of a lack of available services and being left to live in crushing poverty. Not because of their disability. In turn, the lack of available services and a life in poverty kills hope and drives people to choose MAiD to end their misery. This is not the Canada any of us want.

Here is my list of proposed solutions:

- Extend the wait period if a person is not at the end of life
- Implement the Canada Disability Benefit NOW
- Fund the trained professionals from our organizations (and many others) to go into healthcare centres to provide peer support when someone requests MAiD
- Build accessible housing

As Parliamentarians you have a responsibility to change this horrible situation. Please give my recommendations a sober second thought.