

THE CANADIAN GRIEF ALLIANCE

The Honourable Patty Hajdu, PC, MP
Minister of Health
House of Commons
Ottawa, ON K1A 0A6

October 19, 2020

Dear Minister Hajdu:

We are writing in the context of the recent Speech from the Throne on behalf of the Canadian Grief Alliance (CGA). We endorse the government's commitment to "a stronger and more resilient Canada" in the time of COVID-19 and we note the important question posed by the speech: "Do we come out of this stronger, or paper over the cracks the crisis has exposed?"

A yawning void exposed by the COVID-19 pandemic is the lack of adequate support for the grieving in Canada. Traditionally, mental health services have not included support for the grieving because grief was seen as natural response to profound loss from which most of us would recover with whatever social supports were available to us organically. Of course, not everyone has the social supports they need. But we also know that when loss is complicated by circumstances, it may disrupt our natural resilience and often results in mental health issues such as depression, anxiety, and even suicidal thoughts.

In this pandemic, many people have been unable to visit the ill, to spend time with the dying, or to be at the deathbed of loved ones. In some cases, the last glimpse and the last words have been via a cell phone held aloft by a nurse. The rituals of grief—the funeral, the bustling home, filled with relatives and friends—have been replaced with the sterility of a Zoom call. This is by any standard disrupted, complicated grief, likely to lead to enormous suffering. This pandemic of grief will take a toll on the mental health of tens of thousands of Canadian and unfortunately, their suffering will eventually place an additional cost and burden on the mental health system.

Since we last wrote to you in early May, another 4,000 Canadians have died of COVID-19 and 120,000 have died of other causes. We estimate that 1.32 million Canadians have had their grief disrupted by the public health restrictions designed to contain the virus. In the spirit of the Speech from the Throne, we are asking you to meet with us to discuss our proposal for addressing the pandemic of grief.

The CGA proposal is supported by leading health, Indigenous, LGBTQ+, and disease-based organizations, palliative care associations and bereavement groups. Signatories include:

- Canadian Medical Association
- Canadian Nurses Association

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THE INTERNATIONAL CENTRE FOR DIGNITY & PALLIATIVE CARE, INC

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- Canadian Association of Social Workers
- Canadian Association of Spiritual Care
- Canadian Association of Psychosocial Oncology
- Pauktuutit Inuit Women of Canada
- Canadian Aboriginal HIV/AIDS Network
- The Enchanté Network
- Young Adult Cancer Canada
- BC Centre for Palliative Care
- Centre for Education and Research on Aging and Health, Lakehead University
- 8 provincial palliative care associations, including Ontario and Quebec
- More than 800 Canadians, including leading academics

We are calling for a fast-tracked consultation that will guide a three-year federal investment to improve access to grief supports in our communities, public education on grief, and investment in research to better understanding and respond to pandemic-related grief.

The Speech from the Throne acknowledged that “The pandemic is the story of parents who have died alone, without loved ones to hold their hands”. It is also the story of spouses, siblings, grandparents, children, healthcare providers and others providing essential services who have died without the comfort of friends and family. Finally, it is a story of those left behind: those who live on with unassuaged grief and cannot access grief supports with months-long long waiting lists, that are out of their reach financially or in most cases, simply do not exist.

As noted in the Speech from the Throne, the COVID-19 pandemic is the largest public health crisis Canada has ever faced. Prolonged, complex grief is a direct result. “We don’t decide when hardship comes,” the speech said, “but here in Canada, we have decided how we want to address it”. We ask that the government show the same compassion for the grieving as it has to others in need at this difficult time.

We understand the variety and weight of issues that have confronted the government in the course of this pandemic. However, we are disappointed that since we raised the issue of grief in the spring, there has been no progress towards addressing this growing “crisis within a crisis.” While additional resources have been allocated to mental health services, grief continues to be largely ignored to the detriment of both society and our economy.

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Canada needs a coherent policy to address the limitations of our grief services across the country. The pandemic has exacerbated barriers to the patchwork of existing supports. We know that the greatest neglect is of Indigenous Peoples, Canadians living in rural and remote areas, children, immigrants and refugees, and those providing essential health services. The window to get ahead of this looming public health crisis is quickly closing. We are in the unenviable position of playing a frantic game of catch up.

The Speech from the Throne speaks eloquently of “the hope that lifts the soul on dark days”. Today, tens of thousands of Canadians are struggling with deep, prolonged, complicated grief and they are looking to us for hope: they need specialized grief support.

Once again, we ask that you meet with us at the earliest opportunity to discuss our proposal.

Sincerely,



Paul Adams



Shelly Cory

Organizations Supporting the Canadian Grief Alliance Proposal to October

National

Canadian Medical Association
Canadian Nurses Association
Canadian Society of Palliative Care Physicians
Canadian Association of Social Workers
Canadian Association for Spiritual Care
The Enchanté Network
Young Adult Cancer Canada
Canadian Association of Psychosocial Oncology
Pauktuutit Inuit Women of Canada
Canadian Aboriginal HIV/AIDS Network
All Nations Hope Network
Dying With Dignity Canada
Canadian Association for Marriage & Family Therapy
End of Life Doula Association of Canada
The Leukemia & Lymphoma Society of Canada
Canadian Alliance for Grieving Children and Youth
Canada Bereavement Registry
Canadian Integrative Network for Death Education and Alternatives
Schizophrenia Society of Canada
Melanoma Network of Canada
Canadian Health Advocates Inc.
Canadian Medical Hall of Fame

Alberta

Alberta Hospice Palliative Care Association
Covenant Health Palliative Institute
Caregivers Alberta
Hospice Calgary
Red Deer Hospice
Hospice Society of Camrose and District
Children's Grief Centre
Healthy Directions
Transitions Music Therapy
Oliver's Funeral Home

British Columbia

BC Hospice Palliative Care Association
BC Centre for Palliative Care
Family Caregivers of BC
Island Health
Vancouver Island Health Authority
BC Bereavement Helpline

Camp Kerry
Kilala Lelum (Urban Indigenous Health & Healing Cooperative)
Abbotsford Hospice Society
Vancouver Hospice Society
Delta Hospice Society
Hospice Society of the Columbia Valley
Prince Rupert and District Hospice Society
Victoria Hospice Society
Peace Arch Hospice Society
Burnaby Hospice Society
Crossroads Hospice Society
100 Mile District Hospice Palliative Care Society
Sea to Sky Hospice Society
Desert Valley Hospice Society
West End Seniors' Network
Moving Forward Family Services
Life and Death Matters
Honour End of Life Care
Pacific Well-Being

Manitoba

Palliative Manitoba
Rainbow Resource Centre
Two-Spirited People of Manitoba Inc.
Cancer Care Navigation Services - Northern Regional Health Authority
Rock Lake Palliative Care
Peguis Home & Community Care
Robert Smith School

New Brunswick

NB COPES Child and Family Grief Center

Newfoundland and Labrador

Newfoundland and Labrador Palliative Care Association

Nova Scotia

NS Hospice Palliative Care Association
Doctors Nova Scotia
Caregivers Nova Scotia
Hospice Halifax
Colchester East Hants Hospice Society
Good Grief Halifax

Ontario

Hospice Palliative Care Ontario
Global Institute of Psychosocial and Palliative and End-of-life Care, University of Toronto
Ontario Association of Social Workers
RNAO Palliative Care Nurses Interest Group
Centre for Education and Research on Aging & Health at Lakehead University
de Souza Institute
Hope House Community Hospice
Dundas County Hospice
Hospice Outreach Programs of Elgin
Hospice Muskoka
McNally House Hospice
Madawaska Valley Hospice Palliative Care
Hazel Burns Hospice
Hospice Wellington
Dr Bob Kemp Hospice and Bereavement Services
Heart House Hospice
St. Joseph's Hospice Sarnia Lambton
St Joseph's Hospice London
Hospice Northwest
Roger Neilson House
Evergreen Hospice
Hospice Peterborough
Matthews House Hospice
Doane House Hospice
Kensington Health
Near North Palliative Care Network
Bereavement Ontario Network
Bereaved Families of Ontario - South Central Region
Bereaved Families of Ontario – Ottawa
Bereaved Families of Ontario – Kingston
Bereaved Families of Ontario - Midwestern Region
Healing Broken Hearts
Good Grief! Bereavement Healing Services
Gilda's Club of Greater Toronto
The Hummingbird Centre for Hope
Grief Recovery Ontario
Dr. Jay Children's Grief Centre
Children and Youth Grief Network
The Lighthouse Program for Grieving Children
Seasons Centre for Grieving Children
Jewish Family and Child Service of Greater Toronto
Victorian Order of Nurses - Oxford
Unity Health Toronto
Selah Resources
Hulse, Playfair & McGarry

Prince Edward Island

Hospice PEI

Quebec

Association québécoise de soins palliatifs

McGill Council on Palliative Care

Maison Michel Sarrazin

Réseau Québécois de recherche en soins palliatifs et de fin de vie

Regroupement des Infirmiers-Infirmières Ressources en don d'organes et de tissus du Québec

Palli-aide accompagnement en soins palliatifs Saguenay inc.

Parents Orphelins, l'Association des parents qui vivent un deuil périnatal

Albatros Montréal

Groupe des Aidants du Sud-Ouest Myra's Kids Foundation

West Island Cancer Wellness Center

Hope & Cope

ORA Loss & Living Program, Ste. Genevieve United Church

Unitarian Church of Montreal

ADATH Congregation

Connexions Resource Centre

Saskatchewan

Prairie Hospice Society

Morning Star Lodge, University of Saskatchewan

Augustana Lutheran Church

The Good Foundation Inc.

Territories

Hospice Yukon

and 18 private enterprises.