

France is proposing to allow terminally ill patients to take lethal medication

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French President Emmanuel Macron looks on during a joint statement with Serbian President Aleksandar Vucic, before a working dinner at the Elysee Palace in Paris, Monday, April 8, 2024. France's government presented a bill Wednesday April 10, 2024 to allow adults with terminal cancer or other incurable illness to take lethal medication, amid growing public demand for legal options for aid in dying. Many French people have travelled to neighboring countries to seek such medication where medically assisted suicide or euthanasia

are legal. French President Emmanuel Macron has long promised such a bill.
Credit: Sarah Meyssonier/Pool via AP

France's government presented a bill Wednesday to allow adults with terminal cancer or other incurable illness to take lethal medication, as public demands grow for legal options for aid in dying.

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To benefit from the newly proposed measure, patients would need to be over 18 and be French citizens or live in France, Health Minister Catherine Vautrin said after a Cabinet meeting.

A team of medical professionals would need to confirm that the patient has a grave and incurable illness, is suffering from intolerable and untreatable pain, and is seeking lethal medication of their own free will. Those with severe psychiatric conditions and neurodegenerative disorders such as Alzheimer's disease won't be eligible.

The patient would initiate the request for lethal medication and confirm the request after a period of reflection, Vautrin said.

If approved, a doctor would then deliver a prescription, valid for three months, for the lethal medication. People would be able to take it at home, at a nursing home or a health care facility, Macron said. If their physical condition doesn't allow them to do it alone, they will be allowed to get help from someone of their choice or by a doctor or a nurse.

The bill now goes to parliament for debate. Vautrin urged "an enormous

amount of listening, an enormous amount of humility, as we are touching subjects of life and death, and an enormous amount of respect for the freedom of conscience of each one of us."

She also announced 1.1 billion euros in new spending on palliative and other end-of-life care.

A report last year indicated that most French citizens back legalizing end-of-life options, and opinion polls show growing support over the past 20 years.

A 2016 French law provides that doctors can keep terminally ill patients sedated before death but stops short of allowing assisted suicide or euthanasia.

Medically assisted suicide involves patients taking, of their own free will, a lethal drink or medication that has been prescribed by a doctor to those who meet certain criteria. Euthanasia involves doctors or other health practitioners giving patients who meet certain criteria a lethal injection at their own request.

Assisted suicide is allowed in Switzerland and Portugal and several U.S. states. Euthanasia is currently legal in the Netherlands, Spain, Canada, Australia, Colombia, Belgium and Luxembourg under certain conditions.

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