



BY Pallium Canada

## Grief & Bereavement Literacy Series

### Session 16: *“Understanding Grief in Canada: A Canadian Grief Alliance Perspective”*

Presenters: **Marney Thompson**, Director of Bereavement Services, Victoria Hospice Society  
**Paul Adams**, Co-chair, Canadian Grief Alliance  
**Feb 27<sup>th</sup>, 2025: 12pm-1pm PST**

Agenda Item	Discussion
<b>Presentation Key Points</b>	<p><b><u>Objectives:</u></b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Recognize the aims and efforts of the Canadian Grief Alliance (CGA)</li> <li>• Understand the needs and concerns of grieving Canadians</li> <li>• Identify the top needed actions reported in the CGA National Action Plan</li> </ul> <p><b><u>Overview:</u></b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• The presenters discussed their mission to improve grief literacy and enhance access to grief support in Canada.</li> <li>• The CGA is a coalition of grief and bereavement professionals advocating for a national grief strategy, improved public education, and expanded support services.</li> </ul> <p><b><u>Background on the Canadian Grief Alliance</u></b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• A coalition of grief and bereavement professionals and leaders.</li> <li>• Formed during the COVID-19 pandemic to advocate for a national grief strategy.</li> </ul> <p><b><u>Grief Literacy</u></b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Defined as the ability to recognize, understand, and act on grief.</li> <li>• Aims to increase awareness and support for grieving individuals.</li> <li>• Education efforts to help individuals and professionals respond effectively to grief.</li> </ul> <p><b><u>Survey on Grief in Canada</u></b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Largest survey on grief ever conducted in Canada.</li> <li>❖ <b>Key Findings from the National Grief Survey</b> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>○ <b>Lack of Support:</b> Half of respondents felt unsupported in their grief.</li> <li>○ <b>Unrecognized Grief:</b> Over half felt their grief wasn’t acknowledged.</li> <li>○ <b>Need for Conversations:</b> 90% found it helpful to be asked about their loss.</li> <li>○ <b>Broad Definitions of Grief:</b> Beyond death, grief can stem from anticipated loss, pet loss, health decline, job loss, and pregnancy loss.</li> <li>○ <b>Gender Disparities:</b> Men report feeling less supported than women, especially in traditional grief services.</li> </ul> </li> </ul> <p><b><u>Challenges in Grief Support</u></b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Family and friends provide the most support, but it is often insufficient.</li> <li>• Formal grief services (e.g., helplines, workplace programs) are less effective. Existing grief support programs are often inadequate or not tailored to individual needs.</li> <li>• Need for better grief education and training for healthcare providers.</li> <li>• Insufficient support for marginalized and rural communities.</li> </ul> <p><b><u>Key Takeaways</u></b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• People want to talk about their grief, but societal norms discourage open conversations.</li> <li>• There is a gap between what grieving individuals need and the support they receive.</li> </ul>

	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Grief support must be personalized and not follow a "one-size-fits-all" model.</li> <li>• Non-death-related grief is significant but lacks adequate formal support.</li> <li>• Healthcare professionals need better grief training and support to prevent burnout.</li> </ul> <p><b><u>Key Recommendations from Professional Consultations:</u></b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Expanding grief literacy through public education, including school programs.</li> <li>• Increasing access to grief support, especially in underserved rural, Indigenous, and immigrant communities.</li> <li>• Securing more funding for grief services.</li> <li>• Specialized support for children, youth, and healthcare professionals experiencing burnout and grief.</li> </ul> <p><b><u>CGA Initiatives</u></b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <b>Grief Chats:</b> A webinar series where participants ask live questions about grief. Over 1,600 attendees have participated, with topics such as pet loss, disenfranchised grief, and grief timelines. Features expert insights and interactive Q&amp;A sessions.</li> <li>• <b>National Grief Network:</b> A quarterly gathering for grief professionals across Canada.</li> <li>• <b>Public Education Materials:</b> Infographics and toolkits to normalize grief conversations.</li> <li>• <b>New Website - About Grief (Launching April 2025):</b> A centralized hub for grief resources and professional referrals that will map grief services across provinces and territories to improve access and collaboration.</li> </ul> <p><b><u>Next Steps &amp; Advocacy</u></b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Establishing a national center for grief (similar to Grief Australia) to coordinate research, standards, and public education.</li> <li>• Strengthening community-based grief support programs across Canada.</li> <li>• Focusing on underserved groups, such as men, children, and those experiencing non-death-related grief.</li> </ul> <p><b><u>Conclusion</u></b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• The Canadian Grief Alliance aims to bring grief out of the shadows by improving grief literacy, increasing support accessibility, and advocating for national action. Attendees were encouraged to visit the CGA website, join the National Grief Network, and stay engaged in future conversations.</li> </ul>
<p><b>Q &amp; A Session</b></p>	<p><b>Q:</b> What are the available non-digital grief support options in the Lower Mainland, given the lack of a dedicated hospice in New Westminster and the barriers elderly individuals face in accessing online bereavement resources?</p> <p><b>A:</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• BC Bereavement Helpline – a province-wide resource offering phone support and a database of local grief services.</li> <li>• Canadian Virtual Hospice – has an "Ask a Professional" feature where people can submit questions to a team of end-of-life professionals.</li> <li>• Canadian Virtual Hospice also provides a Learning Hub with grief training modules for healthcare professionals.</li> </ul> <p><b>Q:</b> Facilitating a pet death grief group next month. What do you see as the most important aspect of pet grief to discuss with participants?</p> <p><b>A:</b> Validation. Normalization. Space to name/express. Recognition of the significant loss/impact in day-to-day life.</p> <p><b>Q:</b> Are there research studies or resources specific to grief related to MAID?</p> <p><b>A:</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• CAMAP (Canadian Association of MAID Assessors and Providers) conducts research on MAID and grief.</li> <li>• A Death Studies journal article explored grief experiences after MAID.</li> <li>• Island Health offers a MAID bereavement pamphlet, available online.</li> </ul>

**Q: Grief Support for Adolescents?**

**A:**

- Challenges:
  - Lack of grief support for teens and children.
  - Schools often rely on guidance counselors, but they have other priorities (e.g., scheduling).
  - Existing grief support in Canada is fragmented and lacks a unified system.
- International Models:
  - "The Irish Pyramid": A public health model categorizing grief support needs.
  - Australia, Ireland, and the UK have better-developed bereavement support systems.

**Building a Stronger Grief Support System**

- Key issues:
  - Lack of centralized, trusted grief resources in Canada.
  - Need for a national organization (e.g., "Grief Canada") to centralize bereavement support.
  - Research exists, but implementation and accessibility are the biggest challenges.

**Men & Grief**

- Men often feel unsupported in hospice and bereavement settings.
- Upcoming webinar on Men & Grief (details to be shared later).
- Paul and his son will participate, along with other experts on men's grief experiences.

**Resources**

- ❖ **Upcoming Session - March 26<sup>th</sup> session: *Walking Through Grief Together: Supporting Family Caregivers Through the Transition to Healing*: [Register](#)**
- ❖ **[Session Recording Link](#)**
- ❖ **Other Links:**  
Joshua's podcast link: <https://www.griefdreams.ca/>
- ❖ **Past sessions**  
<https://www.bc-cpc.ca/echo-project-new-home/echo-project-past-series-and-resources/#1694021429157-e9440b18-3da4>
- ❖ **Action Plan**  
<https://www.bc-cpc.ca/about-us/activities/new-projects/bereavement-study/grief-and-bereavement-support-in-bc-a-collaborative-improvement-action-plan/>
- ❖ "Transitions" - palliative care book recommended at the session to teach others in the care of those who are at end of life.
- ❖ Join the National Grief Network: <https://www.canadiangriefalliance.ca/>