

Polling on Voter Support for Medical Aid in Dying for Terminally Ill Adults

National Polling

Gallup's Poll Social Series: Values and Beliefs, May 2016¹

- > Nearly 7 of out 10 Americans (69%) said they agreed that: "When a person has a disease that cannot be cured...doctors should be allowed by law to end the patient's life by some painless means if the patient and his or her family request it."
- > Gallup concluded: "Bottom Line...California, often a bellwether for change throughout the U.S., may persuade other states to consider passing legislation permitting physicians to allow terminally ill people to end their lives."

Gallup's Values and Beliefs Survey, May 2015²

- > Nearly 7 in 10 Americans (68%) agreed that "Individuals who are terminally ill, in great pain and who have no chance for recovery have the right to choose to end their own life."
- > Gallup noted that support "has risen nearly 20 points in the last two years and stands at the highest level in more than a decade," and support among young adults aged 18 to 34 "climbed 19 points this year, to 81%."

Medscape Poll, December 2014³

- > This online survey of 17,000 U.S. doctors representing 28 medical specialties agreed by a 23-percent margin (54% vs. 31%) that: "I believe terminal illnesses such as metastatic cancers or degenerative neurological diseases rob a human of his/her dignity. Provided there is no shred of doubt that the disease is incurable and terminal, I would support a patient's decision to end their life, and I would also wish the same option was available in my case should the need arise."

The American public consistently supports medical aid in dying by large majorities in both independent national and state surveys. Polling outlets such as Gallup and Harris both report strong support for medical aid in dying. Similarly, state-by-state polling also indicates majority support across demographic groups.

- > The previous Medscape survey on this issue in 2010 showed physicians support medical aid in dying by a 5-percent margin (46% vs. 41%)

Harris Poll, November 2014⁴

- > Three out of 4 Americans (74%) polled after Brittany Maynard utilized Oregon's Death With Dignity Act agreed that: "Individuals who are terminally ill, in great pain and who have no chance for recovery, have the right to choose to end their own life."
- > Only 14 percent disagreed with this position.
- > Support for this position cut across all generations and educational groups, both genders, and even political affiliation: millennials (75%), Gen X (76%), baby boomers (74%), matures (68%), high school (75%), some college (74%), college grad (72%), post grad (76%), Rep. (64%), Dem. (78%), ind. (78%).

Gallup Survey, May 2014⁵

- > Nearly 7 out of 10 Americans (69%) think that doctors should be allowed by law to end the life of a patient who has a disease that cannot be cured "by some painless means if the patient and his or her family request it."

Pew Research Poll, November 2013⁶

- > Two out of 3 Americans (66%) "say there are at least some situations in which a patient should be allowed to die" and "the share saying they would stop their treatments so they could die has remained about the same over the past 23 years."

State Polling

Arizona Polling

Behavior Research Center's Rocky Mountain Poll, November 2015⁷

- > By a 25-point margin (56% vs. 31%), adult heads of households surveyed in Arizona support a "proposed law that would allow terminally ill persons to end their own lives provided that two doctors certify that the person is terminally ill and is mentally competent. The new law would also require that the ill person administer the lethal drug themselves orally or via injection. In this way the patient would be in total control of their end of life decision."
- > Adults in the 55-and-over age bracket support the legislation by more than 2-to-1 (63% vs. 25%). Younger respondents favored the plan by smaller margins.

California Polling

Journal of Palliative Medicine online survey, July-Oct. 2015: Multi-Ethnic Attitudes Toward Physician-Assisted Death in California and Hawaii⁸

- > "Majority of study participants in California (72.5%) were supportive of PAD [physician-assisted death]."
- > "...all ethnic groups were equally supportive of PAD."
- > "Even in the subgroups least supportive of PAD, the majority supports PAD."
- > "In California, 75.6% of non-Hispanic whites, 74.3% of Asians, and 71.6% of Hispanics were in support of PAD compared to 59.6% of African Americans."

- > "Within Asian Americans, Chinese were most favorably disposed toward PAD (82.7% in California), followed by Japanese (74.6% in California) and the Filipino Americans (67.7% in California)."
- > "It is remarkable that in both states, even participants who were deeply spiritual, a majority of 52%, were still in support of PAD."
- > "The effects of gender and ethnicity did not reach statistical significance in terms of attitudes toward PAD."

Field Poll, September-October 2015⁹

- > Two out of 3 California voters (65%) say they support "a bill [End of Life Option Act] that allows California residents who are terminally ill and declared mentally competent, and who have been evaluated by two physicians and have submitted written requests to receive a lethal prescription, which they themselves would administer to end their own lives."
- > Support for the legislation includes both Democrats and no-party-preference registrants (70%), Republicans (55%), male voters (67%), female voters (64%), "majorities of voters across all age and racial/ethnic voter segments, and spans all religious subgroups," including Protestants (58%) and Catholics (55%).
- > The survey found 71 percent of voters in favor of granting incurably ill patients this right [to medical aid in dying], "very similar to levels of support found in each of five previous polls dating back to 1995."

Institute of Governmental Studies, University of California, Berkeley, August 2015¹⁰

- > Three out of 4 Californians (76%) support "a bill under consideration before the California State Legislature [that] would allow terminally ill people to be able to voluntarily end their own lives by taking drugs prescribed by a physician."
- > This support includes 82 percent of Democrats, 79 percent of independents and 67 percent of Republicans.
- > Support was at least 75 percent among whites, Latinos and Asian Americans, and 52.3 percent among African Americans.

- > Support levels of at least 69 percent were registered across all other demographic categories, from gender to educational, income and age levels.

Goodwin Simon Strategic Research & Probolsky Research Poll, June 2015¹¹

- > By a 49-point margin, California voters (69% vs. 20%) support “the End-of-Life Option Act [that] would allow a terminally ill adult who is mentally competent the option to request and receive aid-in-dying medication from a physician.”
- > Support was significant among every voter subgroup, including: Catholics (60%), non-evangelical Protestants (65%), evangelical Christians (57%), whites (69%), African-Americans (67%), Latinos (70%), Asian-Pacific Islanders (69%), men (70%), women (67%), younger voters (69% ages 18-54), older voters (68% ages 55+), Democrats (73%), independents (80%) and Republicans (55%), particularly Republicans over the age of 55 (58%).

Goodwin Simon Strategic Research Poll, July 2014¹²

- > By nearly a 3-1 margin (64% vs. 24%), California voters support “giving a terminally ill person, who is mentally competent, the right to request and receive a prescription for life-ending medication from a physician.”

Colorado Polling

Talmey-Drake Research and Strategy Inc. omnibus poll, Jan. 2016¹³

- > By a 40 percent margin (65% vs. 24%), Colorado voters said they support legislation to allow “those who are terminally ill a reliable and peaceful way to end their lives if and when they want to” by self-administering aid-in-dying “medications prescribed by a doctor.

Strategies 360 Poll, May 2014¹⁴

- > By a 34 percent margin (62% vs. 28%), Colorado voters support “mentally competent, terminally ill patients with less than six months to live be able to end their life using prescription medications they can self-administer.”

- > This majority support includes: 76% of Democrats, 68% of unaffiliated voters, 50% of Republican primary voters, 68% of millennial voters (18-34 years-old), 56% of seniors (65+ years old), 55% of Christians, and 52% of Catholics.

Connecticut Polling

Quinnipiac University Poll, March 2015¹⁵

- > By more than a 2-1 margin (63% vs. 31%), Connecticut voters support “allowing doctors to legally prescribe lethal drugs to help terminally ill patients end their own lives.”
- > All party, age and gender groups support the idea, including voters over 55 years old, who support it 59 percent to 34 percent.

Quinnipiac University Poll, March 2014¹⁶

- > By nearly a 2-1 margin (61% vs. 32%), Connecticut voters support death-with-dignity legislation “allowing doctors to legally prescribe lethal drugs to help terminally ill patients end their own lives” (see question 49).
- > The poll showed majority approval of a death-with-dignity bill among Republicans (51%), Democrats (66%), independents (63%), men (63%), women (58%) and all age groups (18-29: 63%, 30-49: 65%, 50-64: 62%, 65+: 54%).
- > A majority of these same groups (except Republicans and 30-39 year olds) also agreed that if death-with-dignity legislation “became law in Connecticut, and [they] were diagnosed with a terminal illness and had less than 6 months to live and were living in severe pain ... [they] would probably ask a doctor to help [them] end [their] life” (see question 51a).

Purple Insights Poll, February 2014¹⁷

- > Two out of 3 Connecticut voters (66%) support a proposal to allow “mentally competent, terminally ill patients with less than six months to live be able to end their life in a humane and dignified manner, using prescription medications they can self-administer.”
- > This majority support holds across all age groups (<50: 73%, 50-64: 64%, 65+: 62%), among Catholics (61%), Republicans (59%) and disabled voters (65%).

Momentum Analysis Survey, June 2012¹⁸

- > Two out of 3 Connecticut voters (67%) favor allowing “mentally competent, terminally ill patients with less than six months to live to be able to end their life in a humane and dignified manner, using prescription medications they can self-administer.”

Hawai'i Polling

Journal of Palliative Medicine online survey, July-Oct. 2015: Multi-Ethnic Attitudes Toward Physician-Assisted Death in California and Hawai'i¹⁹

- > “Majority of study participants in California (72.5%) were supportive of PAD [physician-assisted death].”
- > “...all ethnic groups were equally supportive of PAD.”
- > “Even in the subgroups least supportive of PAD, the majority supports PAD.”
- > “In California, 75.6% of non-Hispanic whites, 74.3% of Asians, and 71.6% of Hispanics were in support of PAD compared to 59.6% of African Americans.”
- > “Within Asian Americans, Chinese were most favorably disposed toward PAD (82.7% in California), followed by Japanese (74.6% in California) and the Filipino Americans (67.7% in California).”
- > “It is remarkable that in both states, even participants who were deeply spiritual, a majority of 52%, were still in support of PAD.”
- > “The effects of gender and ethnicity did not reach statistical significance in terms of attitudes toward PAD.”

Qmark Research Survey, January 2012²⁰

- > Three out of 4 Hawai'i doctors (76%) support “allowing a mentally competent adult, who is dying of a terminal disease, the choice to request and receive medication from his/her physician to bring about their own peaceful death, if there were appropriate safeguards in place to protect against abuse.”

Maryland Polling

Momentum Analysis poll, Feb. 2016²¹

- > Nearly two out of three Maryland voters (65%) said they “support allowing a mentally capable adult, who is dying of a terminal disease with no hope of recovery, the option to ask for medication to bring about their own death”
- > Support for medical aid in dying included a majority of African-Americans (59%), Republicans (56%), Catholics (53%), and a plurality of voters who attend religious services weekly (46%).
- > A majority (54%) also said they would “want a legal option to end my own life,” including a majority of Catholics (50%), nearly half of conservatives (48%), a plurality of seniors (47%), and about 4 in 10 frequent service-goers (39%).

Goucher Poll, February 2015²²

- > By a 60 to 35 percent margin, Maryland residents support death-with-dignity legislation that would allow mentally competent, terminally ill patients with less than six months to live to obtain a prescription for a fatal dose of drugs that they could self-administer.

Massachusetts Polling

Purple Insights Survey, February 2014²³

- > Seven out of 10 Massachusetts voters (71%) support a proposal to allow “mentally competent, terminally ill patients with less than six months to live be able to end their life in a humane and dignified manner, using prescription medications they can self-administer.”
- > This majority total support holds across all age groups (<50: 73%, 50-64: 73%, 65+: 67%), among Catholics (64%), Republicans (61%) and disabled voters (74%).

Momentum Analysis Survey, May 2012²⁴

- > Seven out of 10 Massachusetts voters (70%) favor allowing “mentally competent, terminally ill patients with less than six months to live to be able to end their life in a humane and dignified manner, using prescription medications they can self-administer.”

Montana Polling

Global Strategy Group Survey, April 2013²⁵

- > Seven out of 10 Montana voters (69%) support allowing a mentally competent adult who is dying of a terminal disease and in extreme pain to choose to end his or her life in a humane and dignified way.

New Jersey Polling

Rutgers-Eagleton Poll, February 2015²⁶

- > By more than a 2-1 margin (63% to 29%), New Jersey residents support a state Legislature aid-in-dying bill that “would allow terminally ill patients to obtain a prescription to end their lives.”
- > “This is not really a partisan issue in New Jersey,” said Ashley Koning, manager of the Rutgers-Eagleton Poll. “Though a difficult subject for many, the issue has widespread support and acceptance here. Public opinion is mainly on the bill’s side.”
- > A majority of New Jerseyans of all denominations and levels of religiosity would prefer to relieve pain and discomfort, even if that meant shortening their life, including Protestants (73%), Catholics (64%) and other non-Protestant residents (59%).

Fairleigh Dickinson University’s PublicMind Poll, July 2014²⁷

- > A double-digit majority of New Jersey adults (51% vs. 38%) agreed that the state legislature should pass “a bill that would allow people with fewer than six months to live to end their life with a lethal dose of prescription drugs and the assistance of a doctor.”
- > The last time this question was polled, in October 2012, when the legislature considered similar legislation, 46 percent said it should pass the bill.
- > “... the consensus seems to be for personal autonomy in deciding how and when to end one’s life when a terminal illness brings the end sooner rather than later,” said Krista Jenkins, director of PublicMind and professor of political science at Fairleigh Dickinson University.

Purple Insights Survey, February 2014²⁸

- > Six out of 10 New Jersey voters (62%) support a proposal to allow “mentally competent, terminally ill patients with less than six months to live be able to end their life in a humane and dignified manner, using prescription medications they can self-administer.”
- > This majority total support holds across all age groups (<50: 65%, 50-64: 69%, 65+: 55%), among Catholics (57%), Republicans (58%) and disabled voters (63%).

Momentum Analysis Survey, April 2013²⁹

- > Six out of 10 New Jersey voters (63%) “favor allowing a mentally competent adult, who is dying of a terminal illness with no hope of recovery, the choice to bring about their death.”

New Mexico Polling

Research & Polling Survey, April 2012³⁰

- > Two out of 3 New Mexico voters (65%) favor “allowing a mentally competent adult, who is dying of a terminal disease, with no hope of recovery, the choice to request and receive medication from his/her physician which could bring about their own death, if there were appropriate safeguards in place to protect patients against abuse.”

New York Polling

Eagle Point Strategies Survey, September 2015³¹

- > Three of 4 New York voters (77%) think “when a mentally competent adult is dying from a terminal illness that cannot be cured, the adult should be allowed the option to request a prescription for life ending medication from their doctor, and decide whether and when to use that medication to end their suffering in their final stages of dying.”
- > “Clear majorities extend across lines based on respondents’ religious affiliation, level of education, political party enrollment, gender, age and region of the state.”

- > When respondents learned more about New York's medical aid-in-dying legislation, including opponents' arguments against it, support increased to 4 out of 5 voters (81%).

Tennessee Polling

Princeton Survey Research Associates International/Vanderbilt University, May 2015³²

- > Tennessee voters agreed by a 17-point margin (55% vs. 38%) that doctors should be permitted to assist people with painful, incurable diseases to painlessly end their lives.
- > Nearly two-thirds of voters (65%) supported some sort of option for ending one's life due to health concerns.

Utah Polling

Dan Jones & Associates survey, Nov. 2015³³

- > Nearly six of 10 adult Utahns (58%) favor "some kind of 'right to die' law, where licensed medical personnel could help a terminally-ill, mentally-competent person die with allowed drugs if that person chooses."
- > Republicans are divided on the issue with 41% saying they favor "right-to-die" legislation and 50% opposed. Democrats and independents overwhelmingly prefer the idea with 90% of Democrats and 67% of independents supporting.
- > There was not much of a religious divide on the question: 94% of those who say they don't ascribe to any religion, self-described "not active" Latter Day Saints (LDS) Church members, 80% of Protestants, 79% of "somewhat active" Mormons, and 76% of Catholics favored the idea.
- > The only religious group opposed to the idea were "very active" LDS Church members by a 54-38% margin.

Vermont Polling

Momentum Analysis Survey, June 2012³⁴

- > Three out of 4 Vermont voters (74%) favor allowing "mentally competent, terminally ill patients with less than six months to live to be able to end their life in a humane and dignified manner, using prescription medications they can self-administer."

Washington, D.C., Polling

Lake Research Survey, July 2015³⁵

- > Two-thirds (67%) of District of Columbia residents support – and 51 percent strongly support – the right of terminally ill adults with less than six months to live to legally obtain medication to end their lives.

Resources

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