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# Doctor Assisted Death: A Survey of Canadian Attitudes



Canadian  
**Institute For Education**  
On The Family

# Presentation Outline

1. Overview of Research
2. Knowledge, Legality and Morality of Doctor Assisted Death
3. In what circumstance should it be legal
4. Arguments For and Against
5. Assisted Death and the Medical Community
6. You, Assisted Death and End of Life Care
7. Your MP and Doctor Assisted Death
8. Perspective after reflection
9. Major Research Findings



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# Overview of Research

# Research Goals

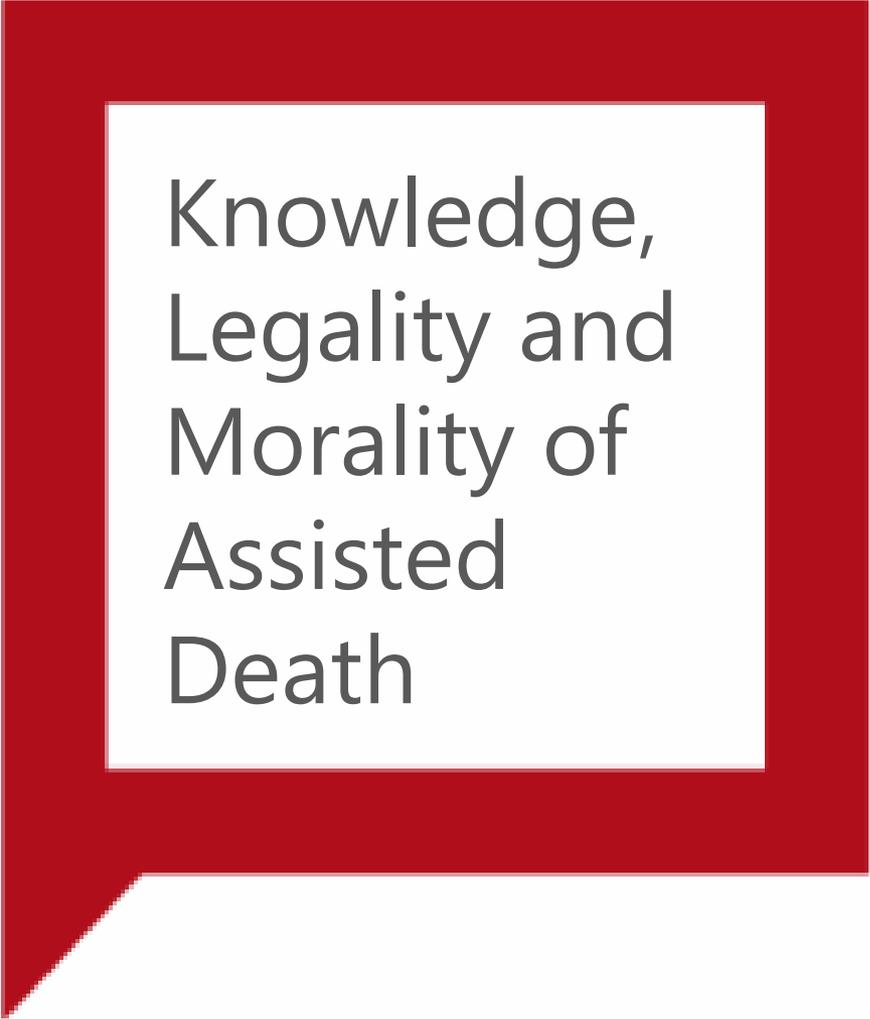
Three core questions:

- 1) How do Canadians feel about the issues surrounding the legalization of doctor assisted death?
- 2) What parts of debate are they concerned with, and who is most likely to be concerned?
- 3) Compare thoughts of communities most affected—the disabled and seniors—as well as Quebec, which has direct experience with the issue.



# Methodology

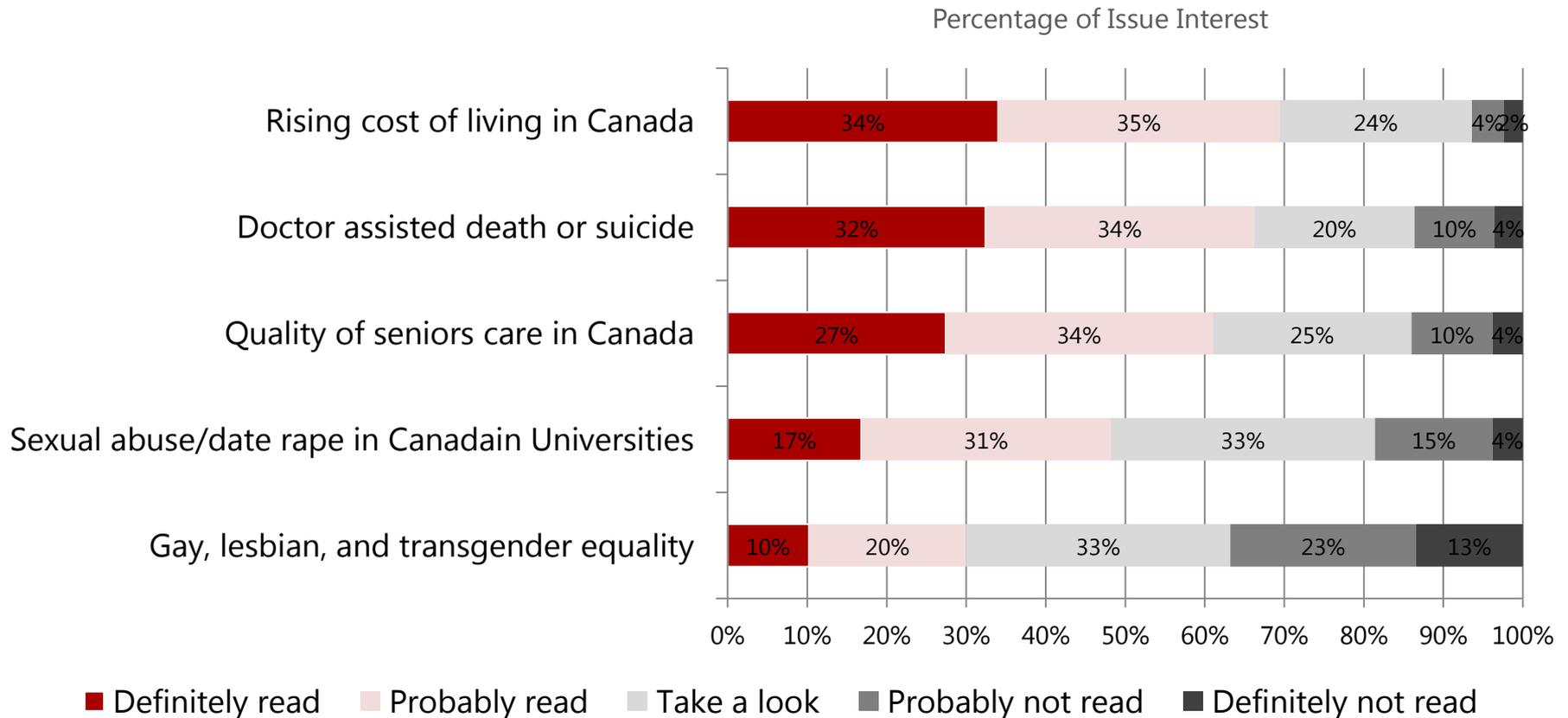
- The research involved a national survey of the general population of 950 Canadian adults in both English and French, including 250 Canadians who self identify as being either physically or mentally disabled, and a targeted oversample of 200 seniors.
- Data otherwise reflect the Canadian census with respect to age, gender and region.
- All respondents are members of the *Angus Reid Forum* online panel.
- The survey was fielded March 7 – March 14, 2016.
- The questionnaire was designed by Public Square in conjunction with LifeCanada.
- The survey consisted of a total of 46 discrete questions, with a median respondent completion time of 12.4 minutes.

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Knowledge,  
Legality and  
Morality of  
Assisted  
Death

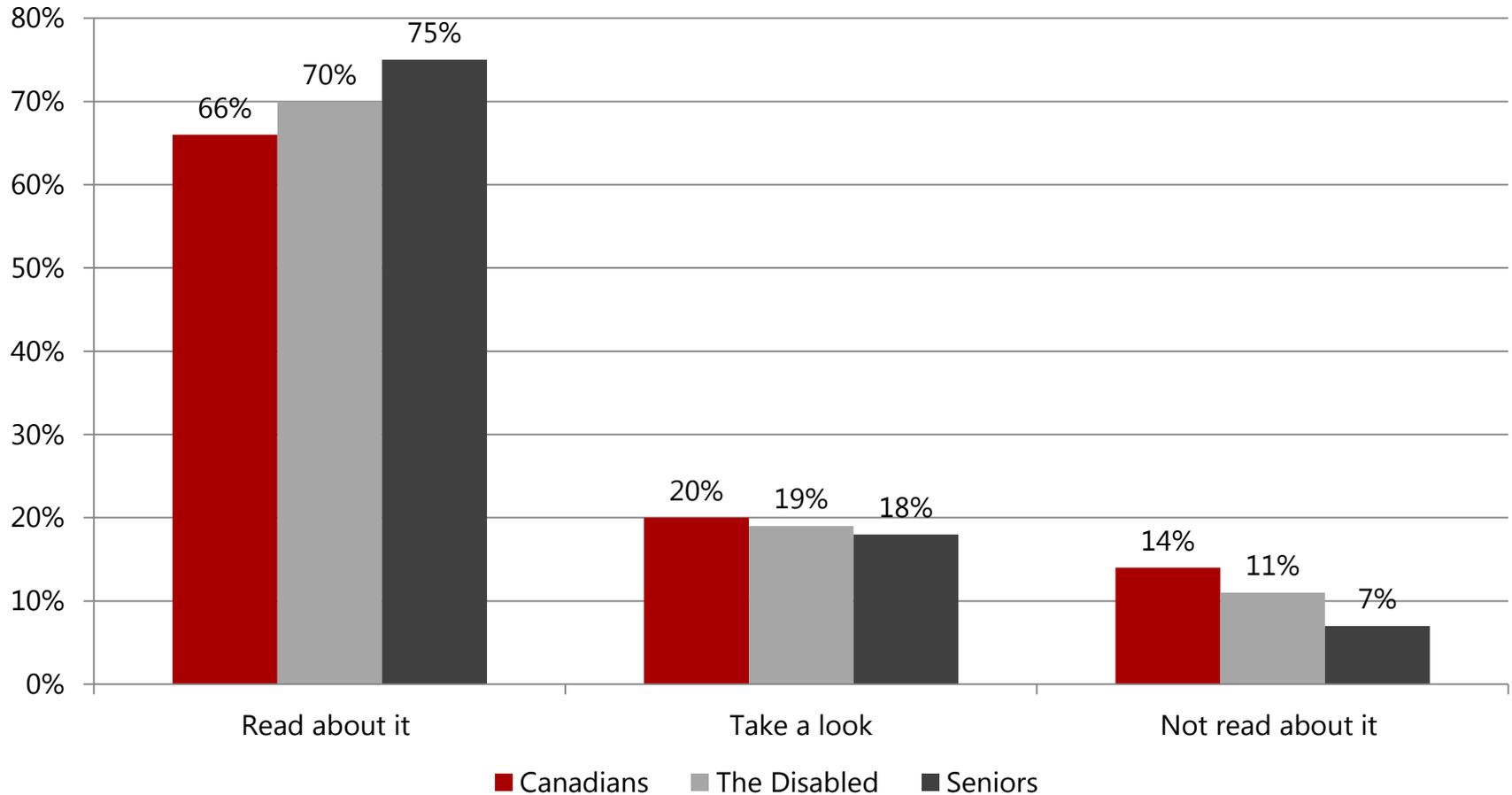
# Interest in Doctor Assisted Suicide

Canadians show considerable interest in the subject of doctor assisted death or suicide, with **66% saying that that they would definitely or probably read about it.**



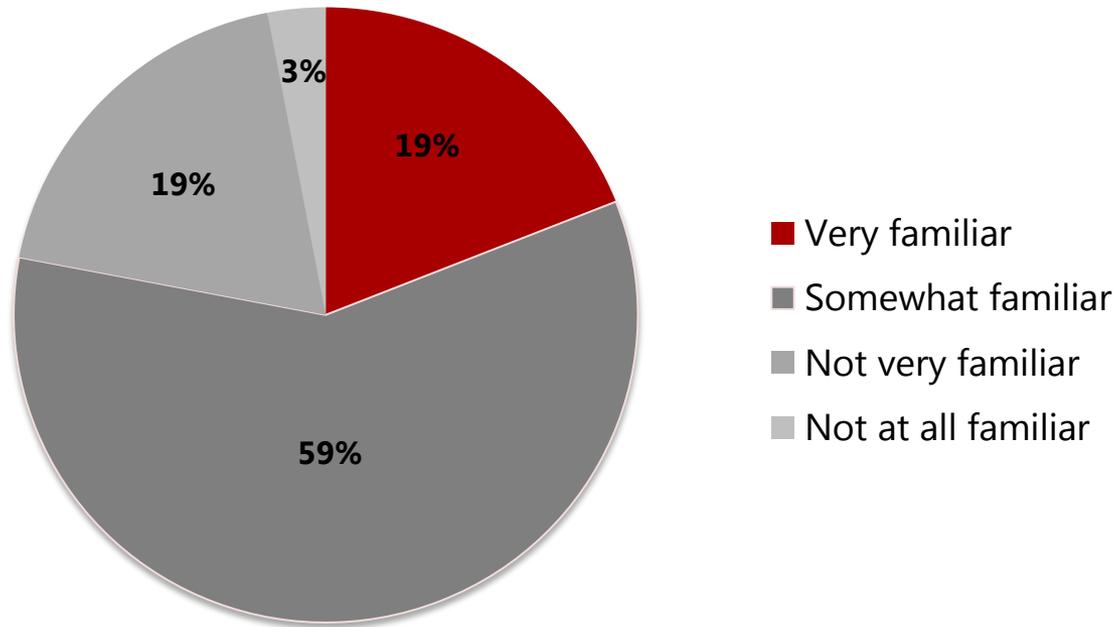
# Issue Interest by population

Not surprisingly, the disabled are somewhat more interested, as are seniors.



# Familiarity with Doctor Assisted Death

Close to 8 in 10 say that they are very or somewhat familiar with the issue surrounding doctor assisted death



In recent months there has been considerable public discussion of “doctor-assisted death.” Would you say you are very familiar, somewhat familiar, not very, or not at all familiar with the issues surrounding assisted death?

# Morality of Doctor Assisted Death

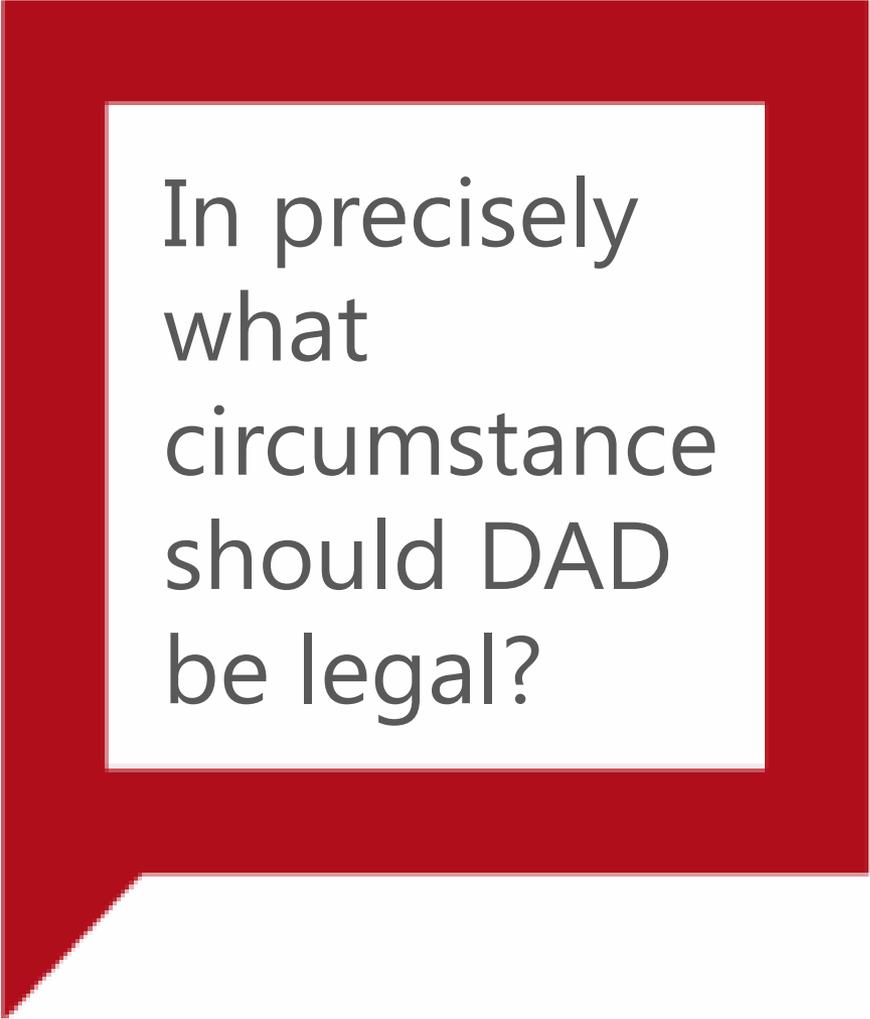


Assisted death is when a doctor or nurse administers a lethal means, such as an injection, to end a patient's life. This is often referred to as euthanasia. In Quebec the term 'medical aid in dying' is often used. Which of the following best describes your own view of assisted death?

# Morality by political party

Liberal and Green party supporters are more likely to find DAD morally acceptable; compared with Conservative or NDP supporters and non-voters.

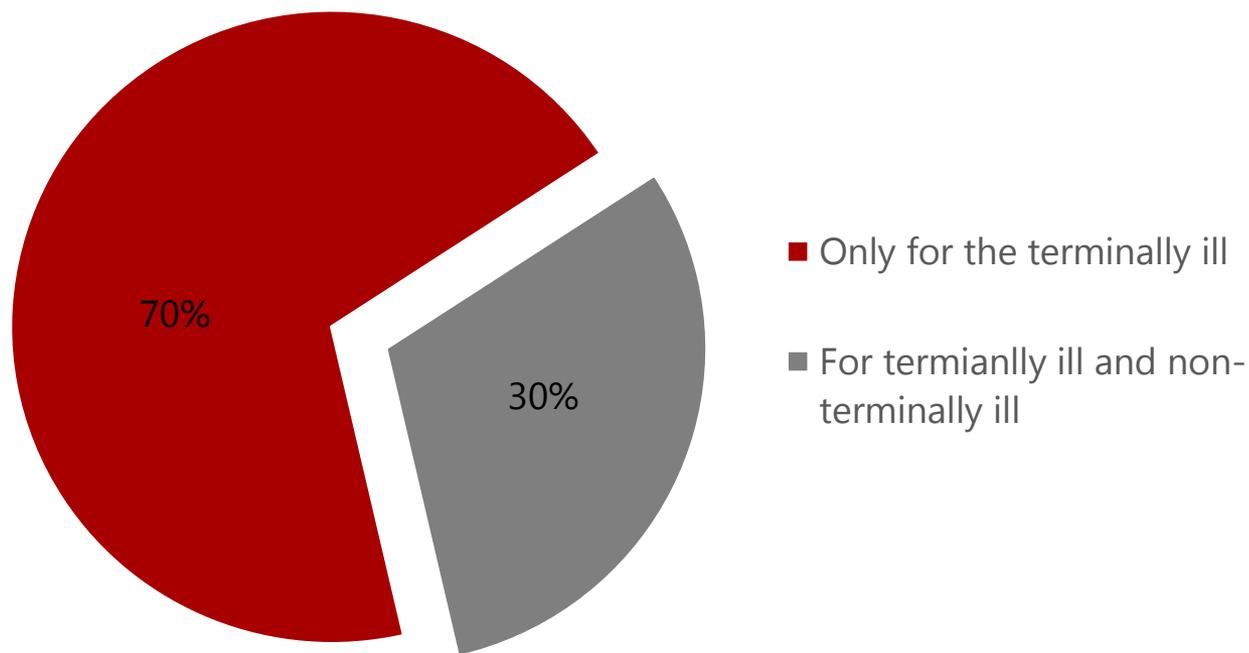
Response	All Canada	Conservative	Liberal	NDP	Green	Other	Did not Vote
Morally acceptable	43%	36%	46%	40%	56%	60%	41%
Usually acceptable	27%	23%	31%	36%	31%	13%	15%
Usually wrong except in certain circumstances	22%	29%	17%	17%	13%	27%	32%
Morally wrong in all circumstances	8%	12%	6%	7%	0%	0%	12%



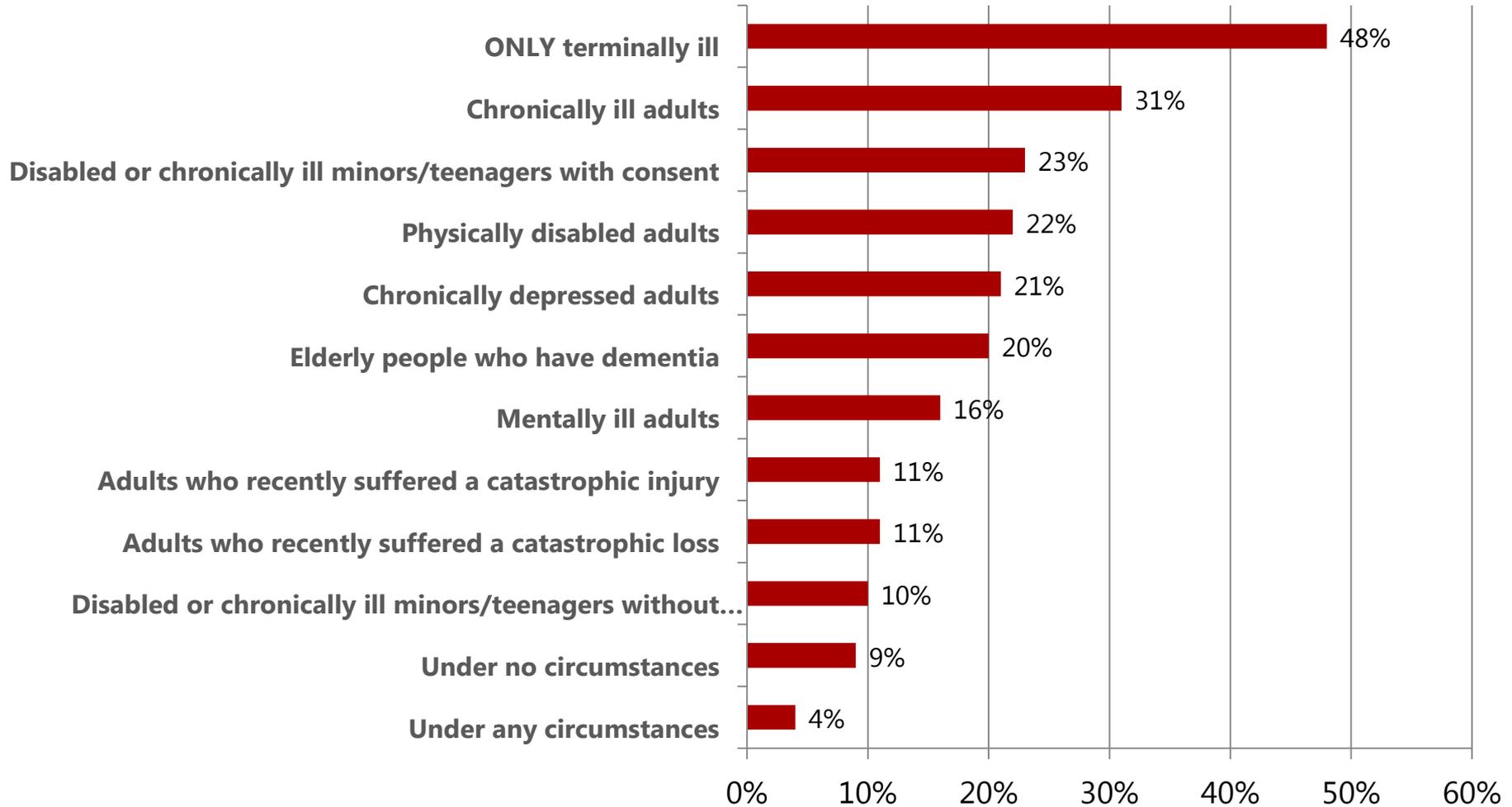
In precisely  
what  
circumstance  
should DAD  
be legal?

# Legality: Identifying Circumstances

While 71% of those surveyed believe doctor assisted death should be legal under various circumstances or with strict limits, that group overwhelmingly (7 out of 10) wants to restrict doctor assisted suicide to only the terminally ill



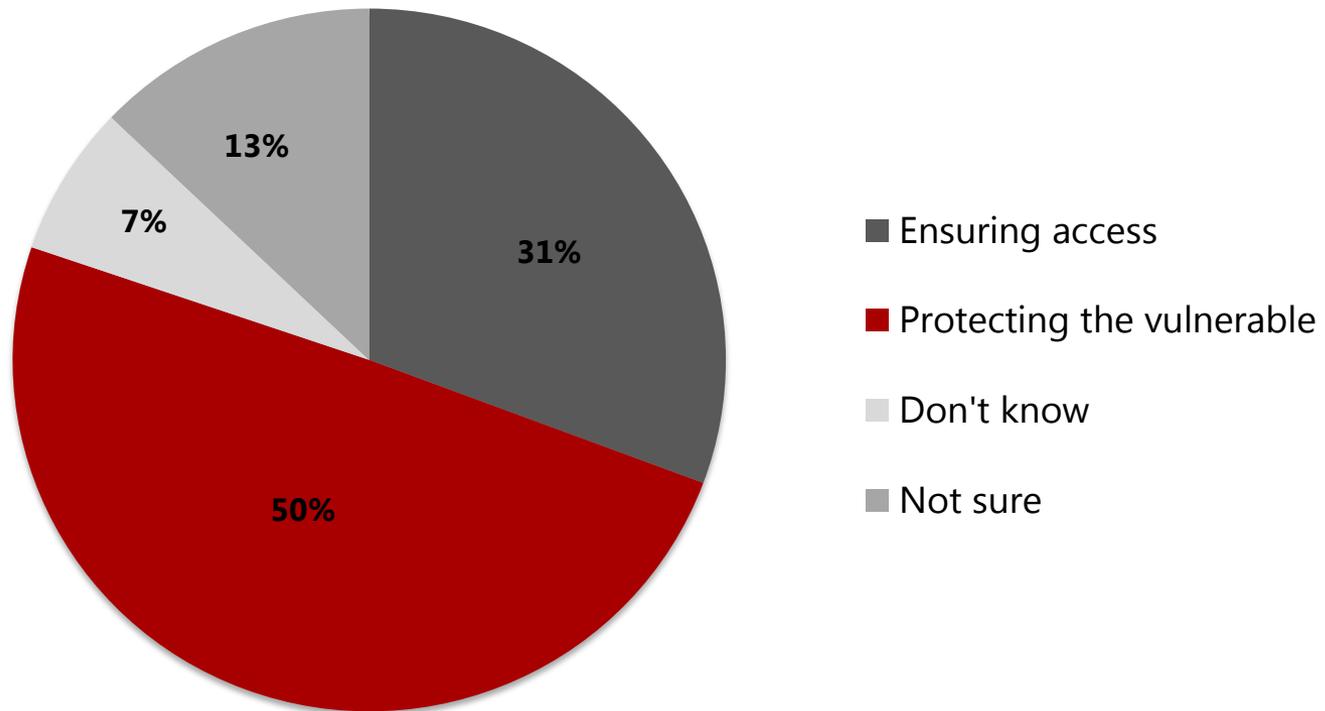
# When should it be legal?



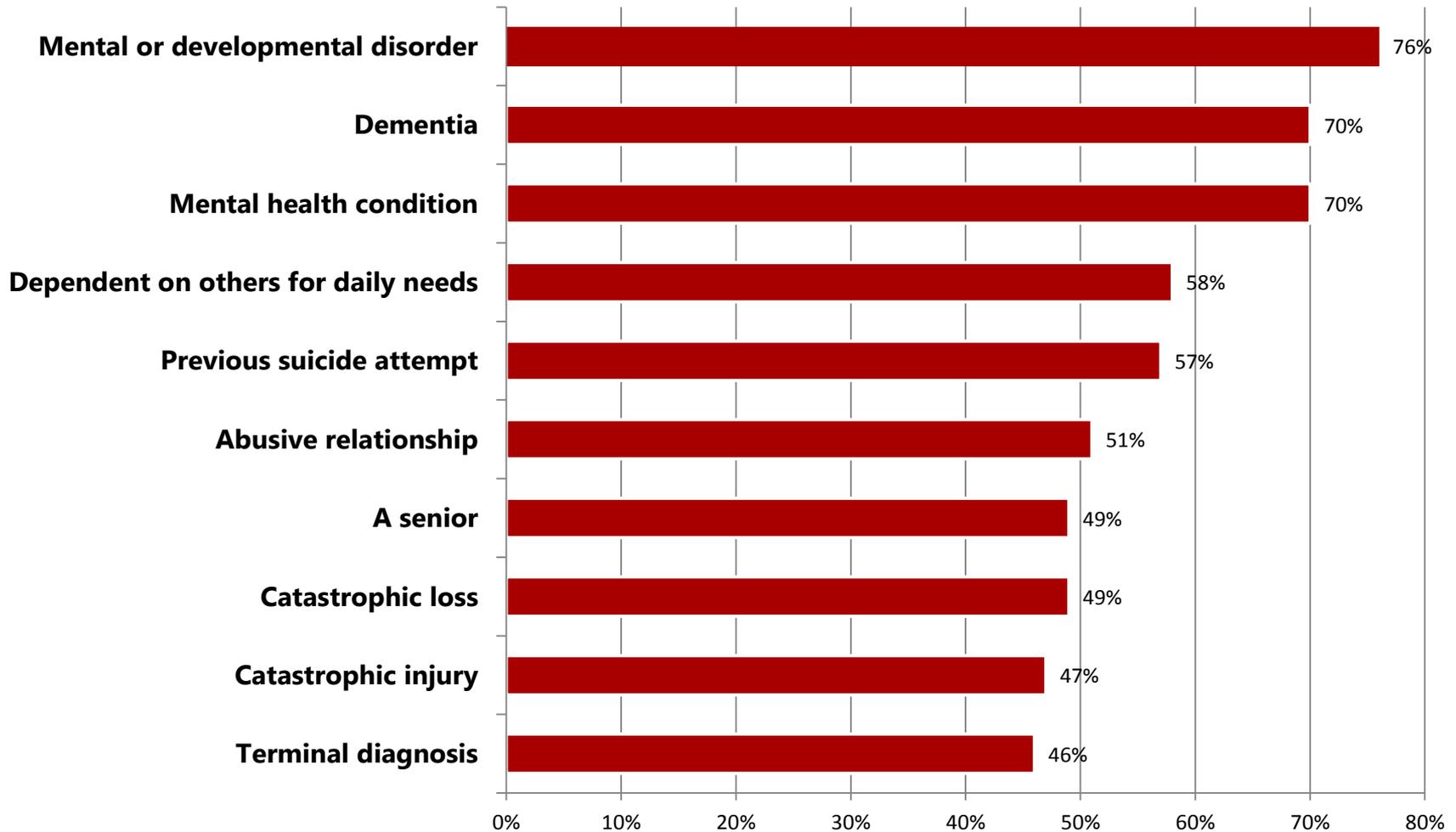
Are there any circumstances in which it should be legal for a doctor or nurse to administer lethal means to end a patient's life?

# Access vs. Protecting the vulnerable

Half of the population places greater importance on protecting the vulnerable, rather than providing access to assisted death



# Who is Vulnerable?

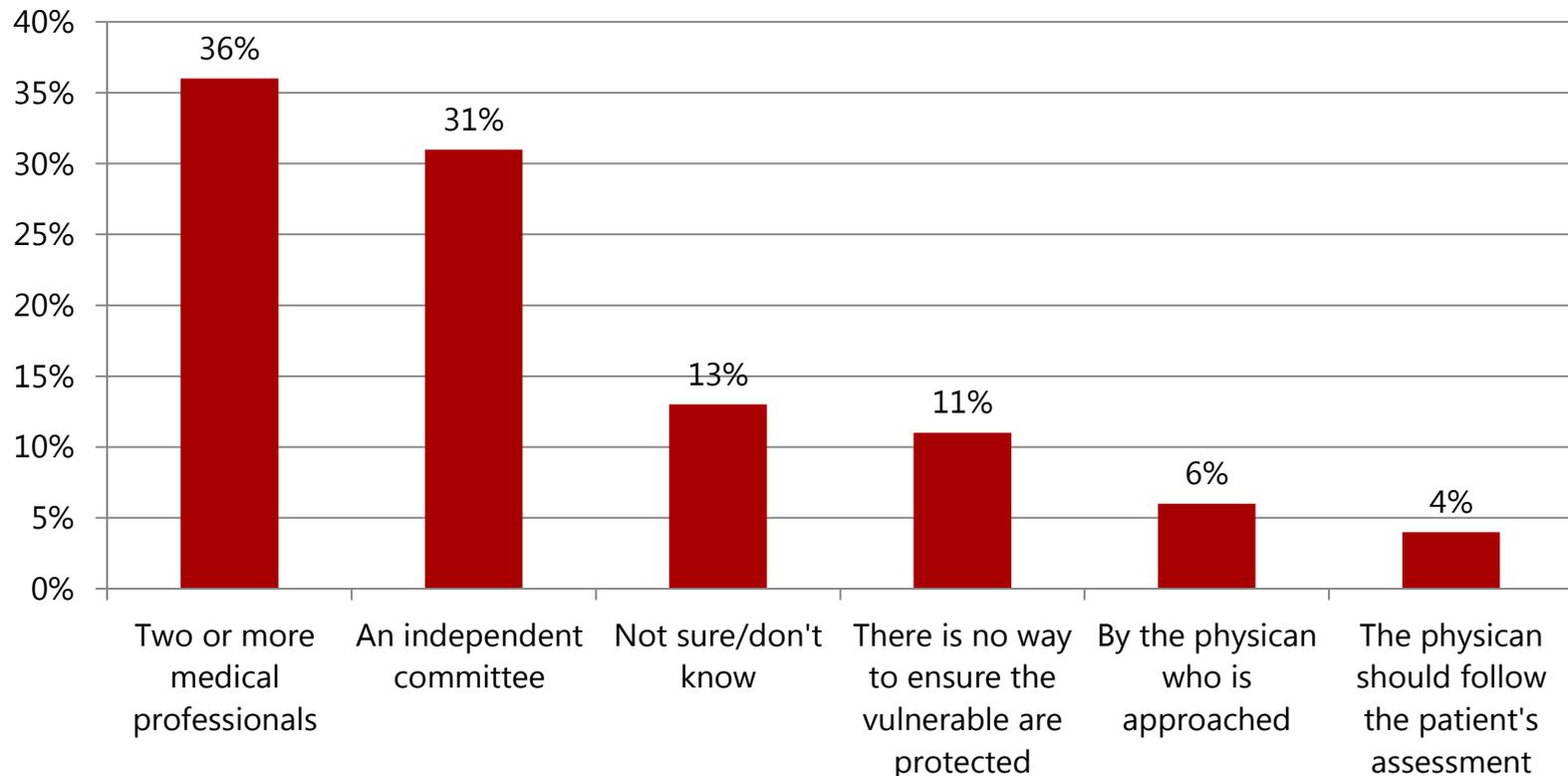


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Assisted  
Death and  
the Medical  
Community

# Responsibility for ensuring protection

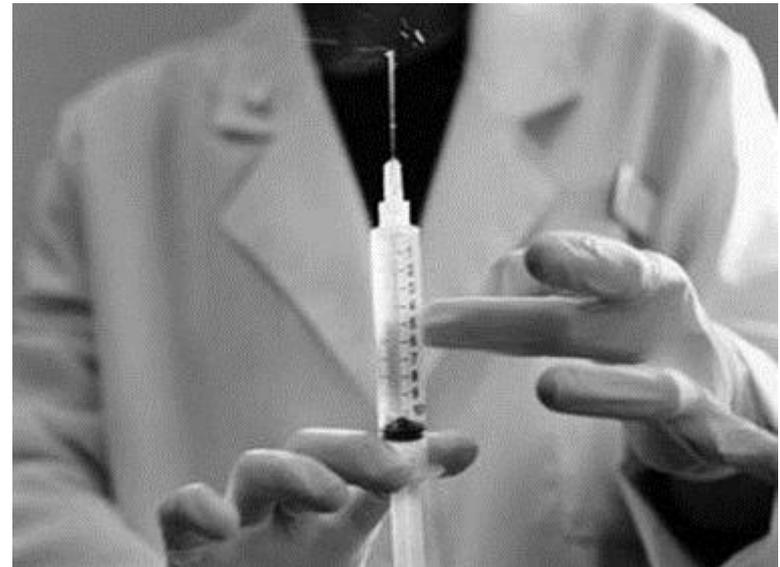
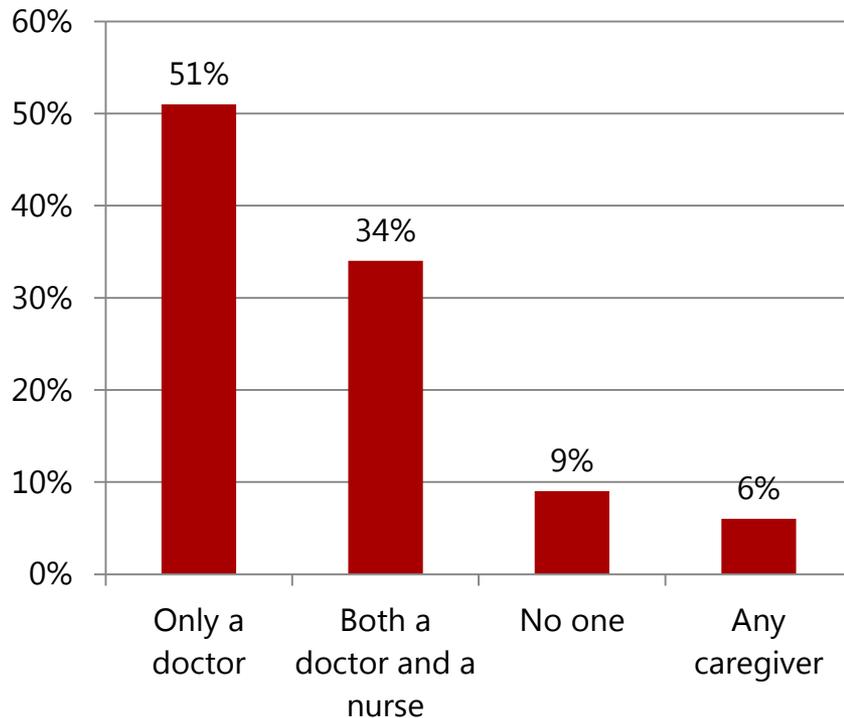
The **majority of Canadians want an independent committee or two or more medical professionals to be involved** to ensure that the vulnerable are protected. Only 6% feel that the physician approached should be responsible.



If doctor assisted suicide were to become legal ... who should be responsible to ensure that those who may be vulnerable are protected?

# Who should administer?

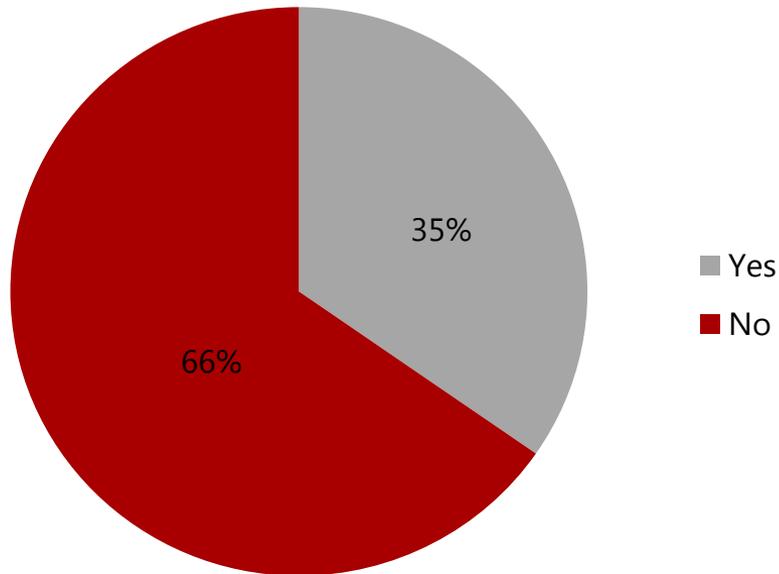
More than half say that only a doctor should be allowed to administer a lethal dose



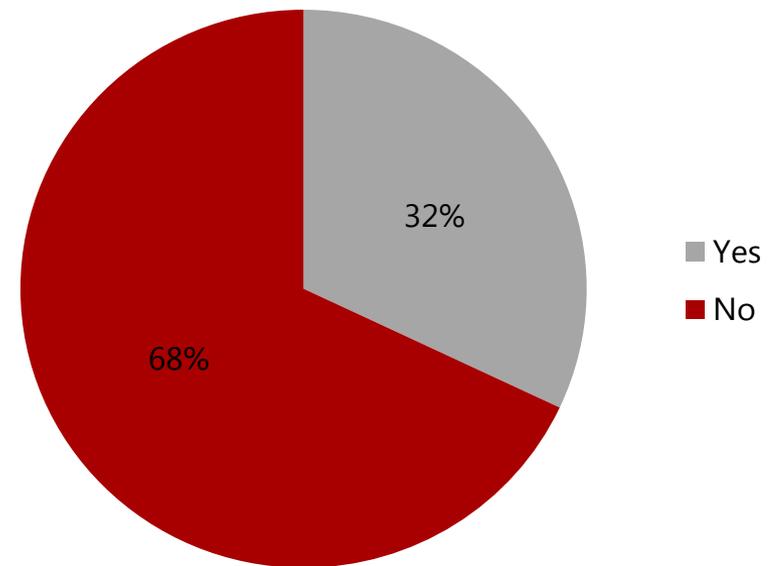
# Obligation to provide DAD

Majority of Canadians do not feel that medical professionals or religious institutions should be obligated to provide assisted death

Should **medical professionals** be obligated to provide DAD if it is against their moral beliefs



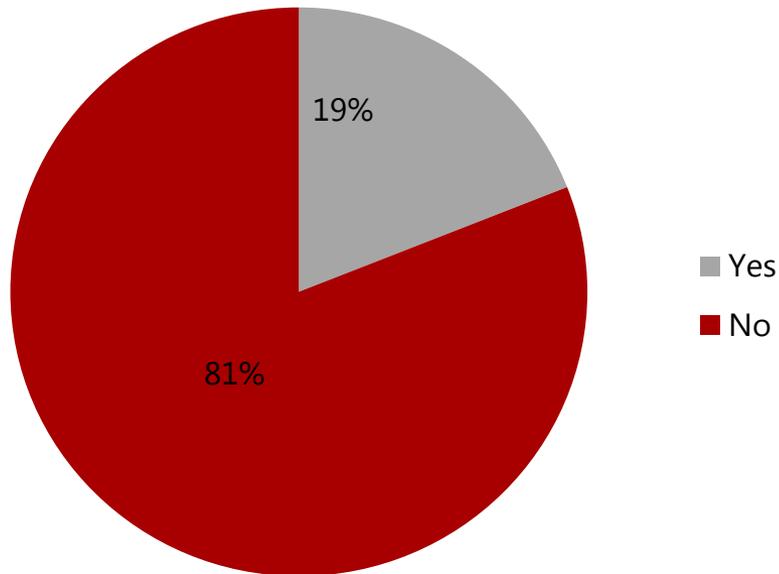
Should **religious institutions** that provide end of life palliative care be obligated to provide assisted death or suicide if it is against their religious beliefs?



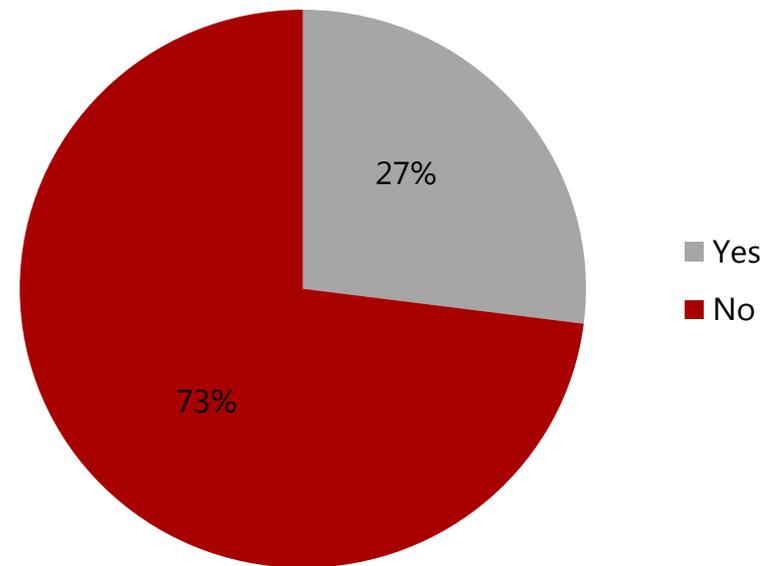
# Obligation to provide DAD: Seniors

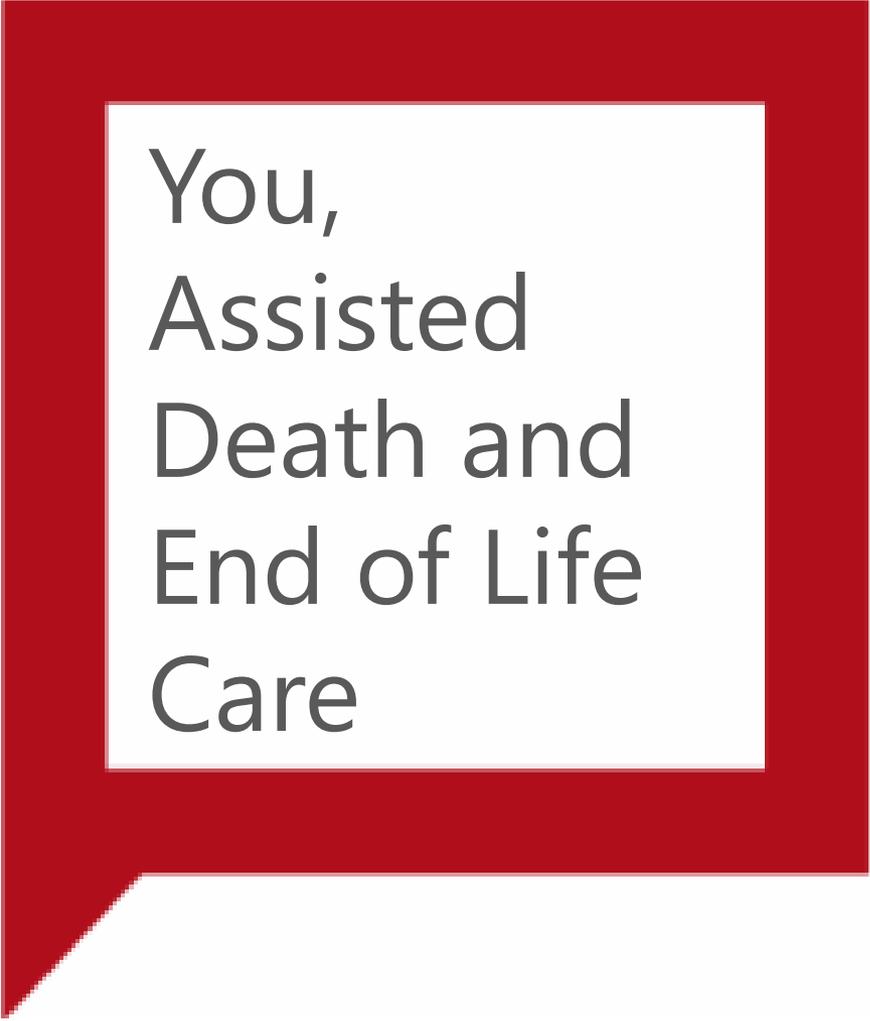
Seniors are much less likely to say that medical professionals or religious institutions should be obligated to provide DAD

Should **medical professionals** be obligated to provide it if it is against their moral beliefs



Should **religious institutions** that provide end of life palliative care be obligated to provide assisted death or suicide if it is against their religious beliefs?

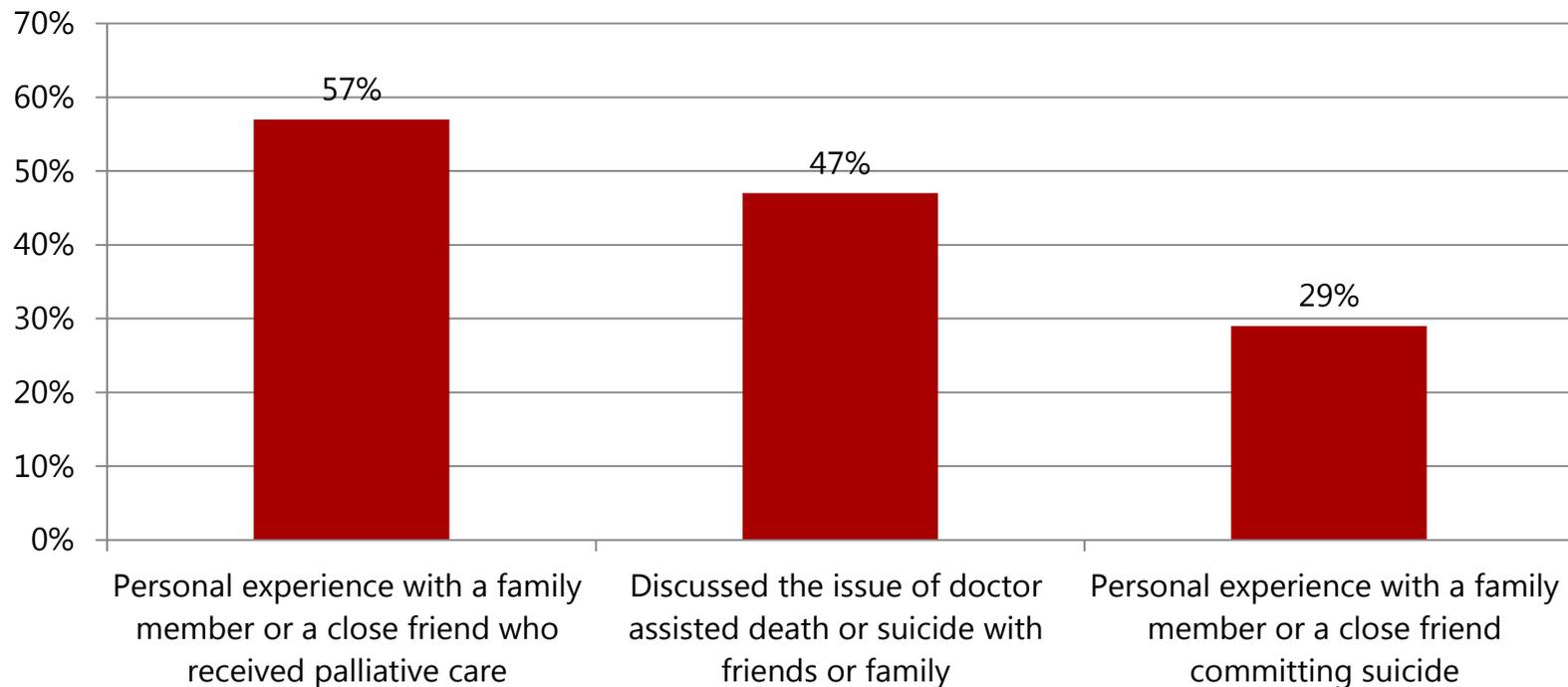


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You,  
Assisted  
Death and  
End of Life  
Care

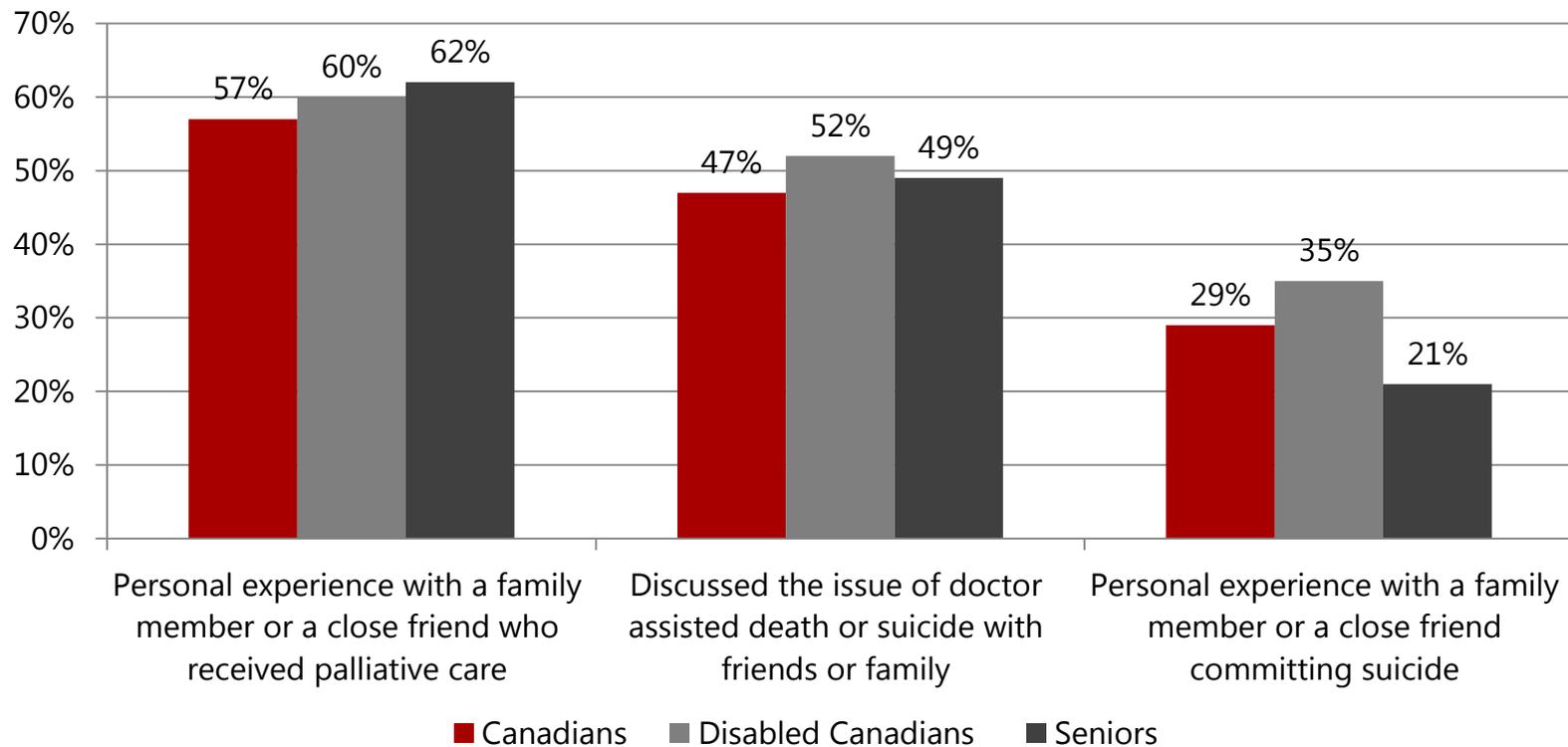
# Personal Experience

Almost 6 in 10 Canadians have personal experience with palliative care



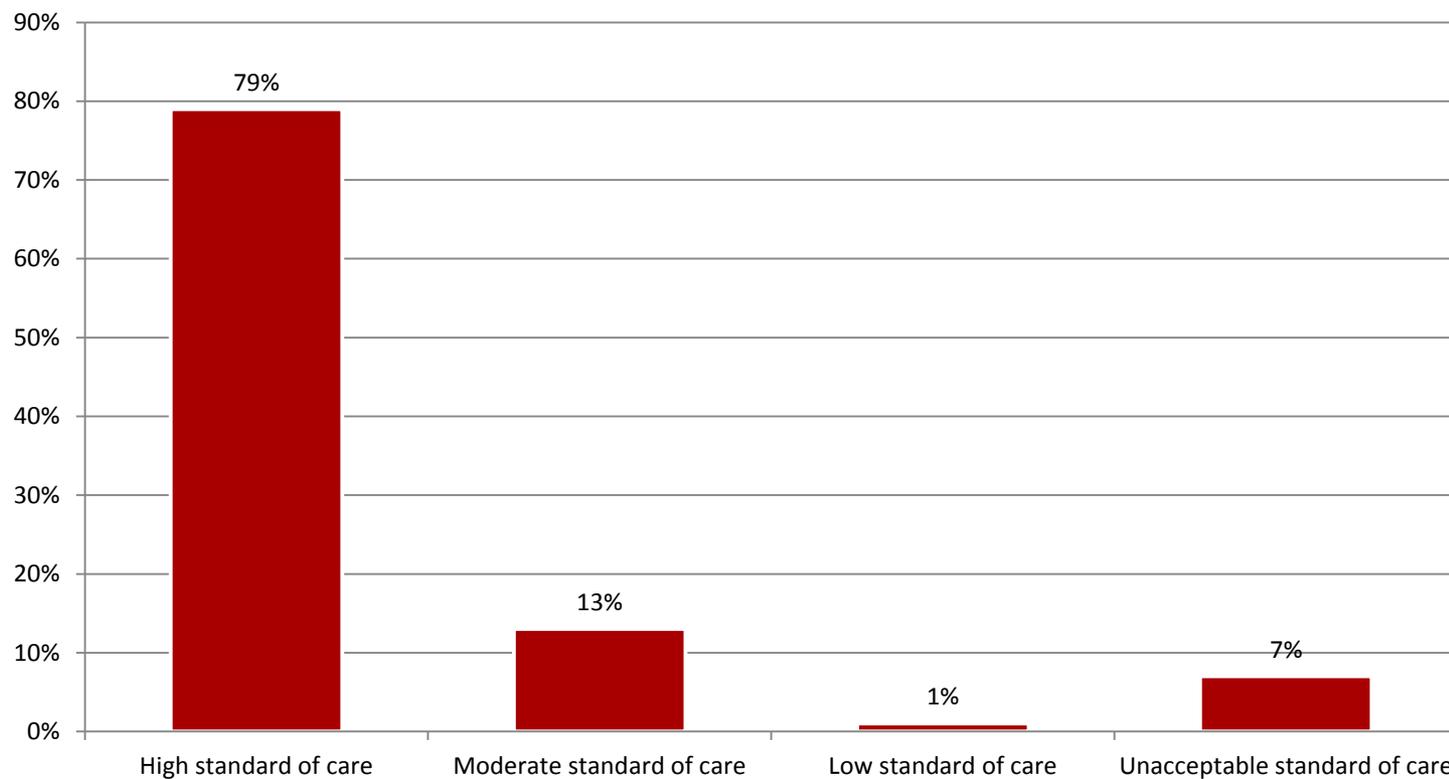
# Personal Experience compared

Percentage who have experienced



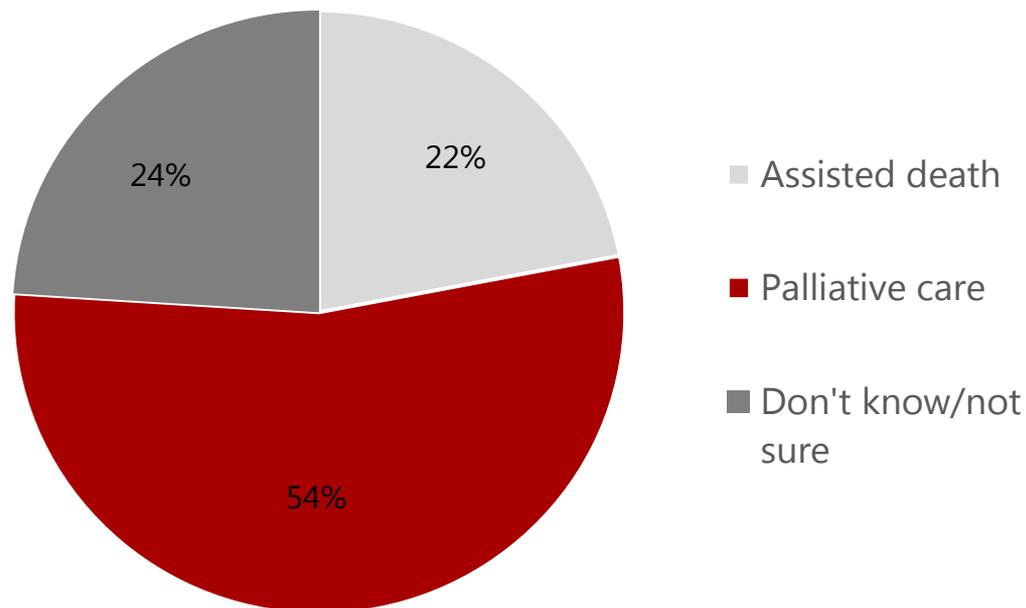
# Quality of palliative care

High rating for palliative care

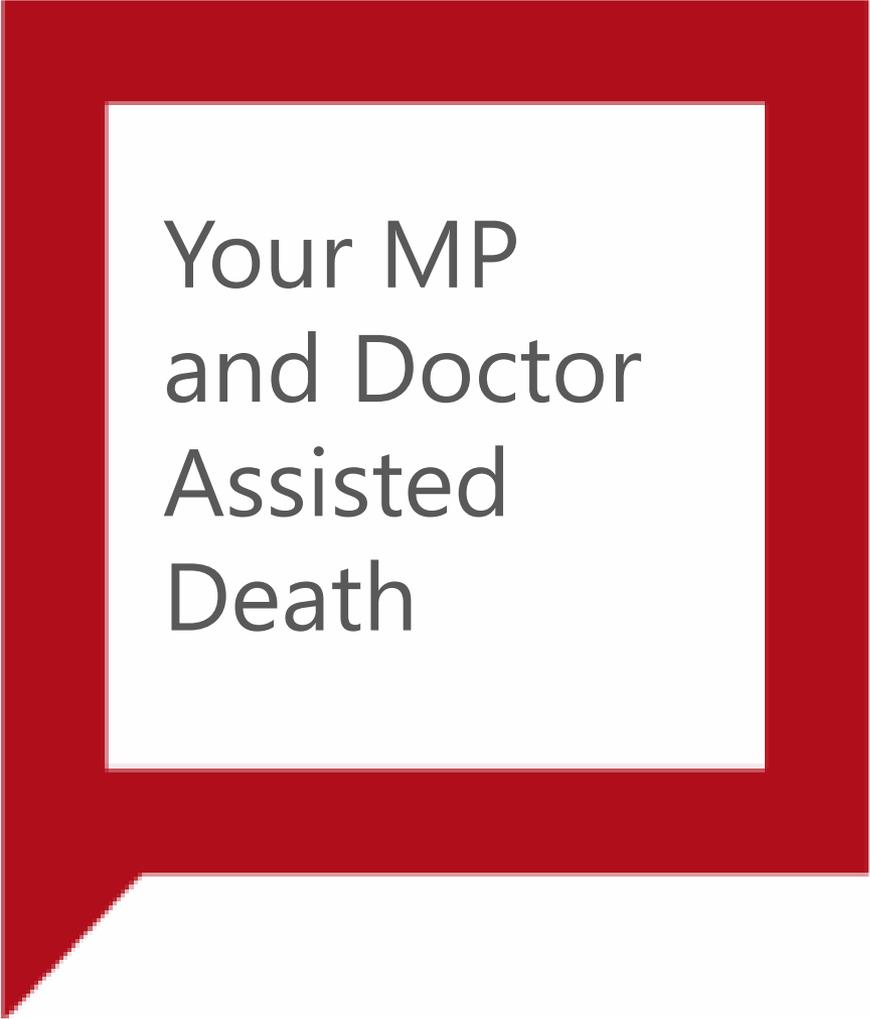


# Access to palliative care vs. assisted death

Overwhelming support for preferred access to palliative care



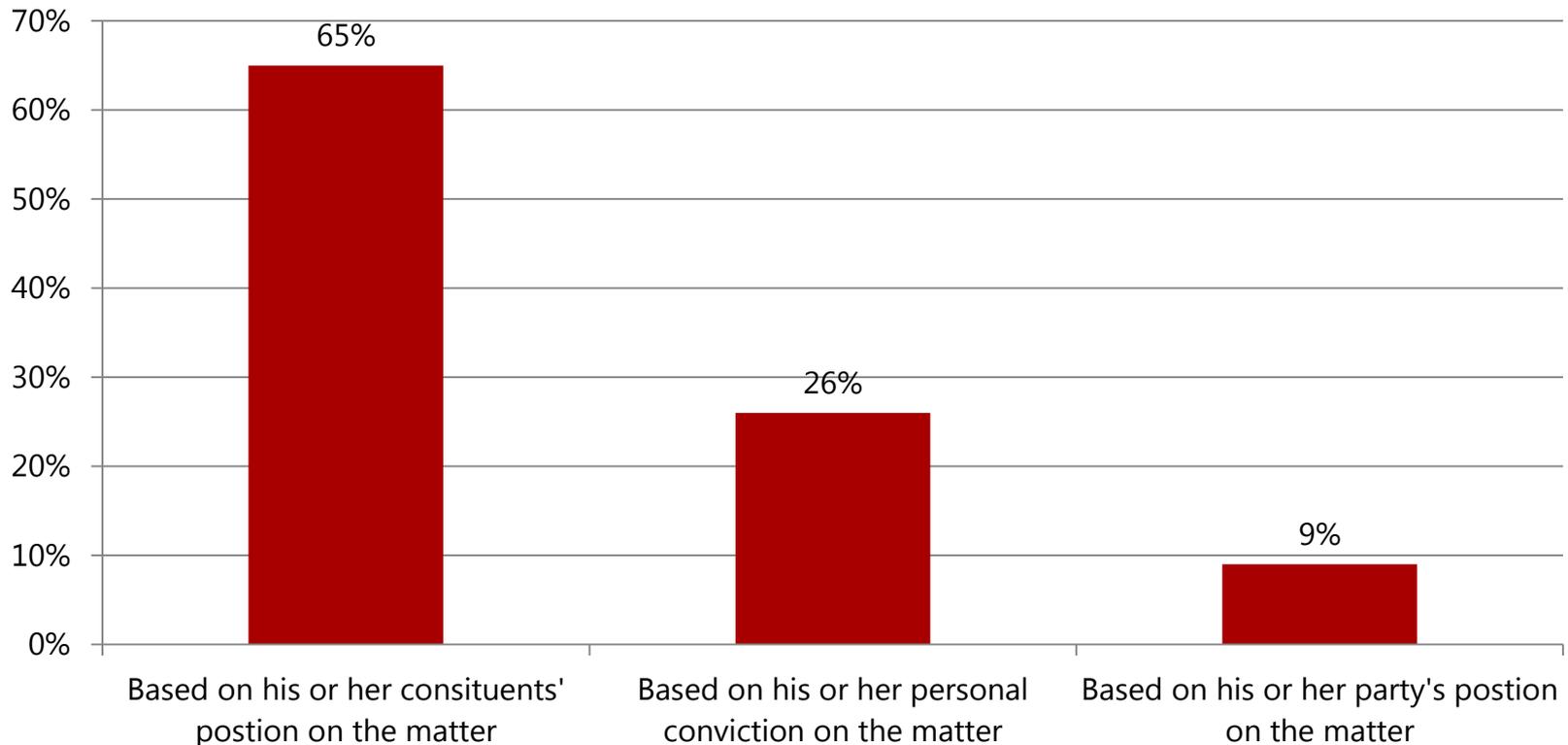
Which is more important to you? Ensuring access to a doctor or nurse who can administer a lethal means or ensuring access to palliative care to alleviate pain and suffering?

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Your MP  
and Doctor  
Assisted  
Death

# How should your MP decide?

Overwhelming majority are opposed to whipping the party vote on this issue

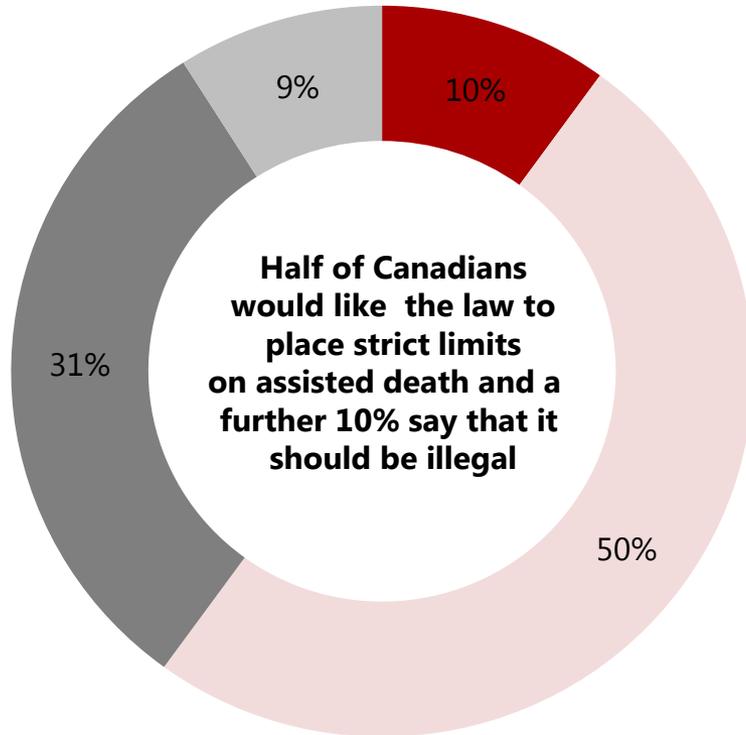


Parliament is expected to introduce legislation making it legal for a doctor to use lethal means to end a patient's life in various circumstances. If the time comes, how should your Member of Parliament decide whether to support the proposed legislation?

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Legality of  
DAD

# Legality



- The law should not allow a doctor or nurse to administer lethal means to end a patient's life under any circumstances
- The law should allow a doctor or nurse to administer lethal means to end a patient's life in only grievous and irremediable circumstances, with strict limits
- The law should allow a doctor or nurse to administer lethal means to end a patient's life under various circumstances
- The law should allow a doctor or nurse to administer lethal means to end a patient's life whenever a patient requests

# Legality: Quebec and the rest of Canada

Interestingly, the province that has arguably the most experience with DAD is also more likely to want strict limits

	Total Population	Rest of Canada	Quebec
The law should <u>not</u> allow ...under any circumstances	10%	11%	5%
Only grievous and irremediable circumstances, with strict limits	50%	47%	58%
Under various circumstances	31%	36%	17%
Whenever a patient requests	9%	6%	20%

# Legality: Seniors and Canada compared

Seniors remain slightly less in favour compared with the Canadian population; albeit modestly, and note this relationship is not statistically significant.

	Canada	Seniors
The law should <u>not</u> allow ...under any circumstances	10%	12%
Only grievous and irremediable circumstances, with strict limits	50%	52%
Under various circumstances	31%	27%
Whenever a patient requests	9%	10%



Major  
Findings

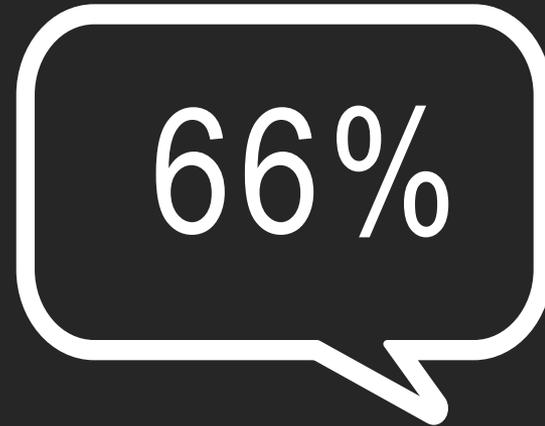
# KNOWLEDGE OF DOCTOR ASSISTED DEATH

78%



Say they are familiar with the issues surrounding doctor assisted death.

66%



Say they are interested in reading about the issue.

47%

Close to half qualify the morality of doctor assisted death – with some reservation – and a further 8% say doctor assisted death is always wrong



# Legality in context

## Only the terminally ill

67% of those who agree to legalizing DAD with strict limits or in various circumstances, would like legalization to be confined to the terminally ill

50%

Only grievous and irremediable circumstances, with strict limits

## Extend to chronically ill

Only 31% of Canadians would extend DAD to the chronically ill

31%

In various circumstances

## Few want assisted death extended beyond the chronically ill

Less than 25% of Canadians agree to legalizing any form of DAD to others who are not terminally or chronically ill

9%

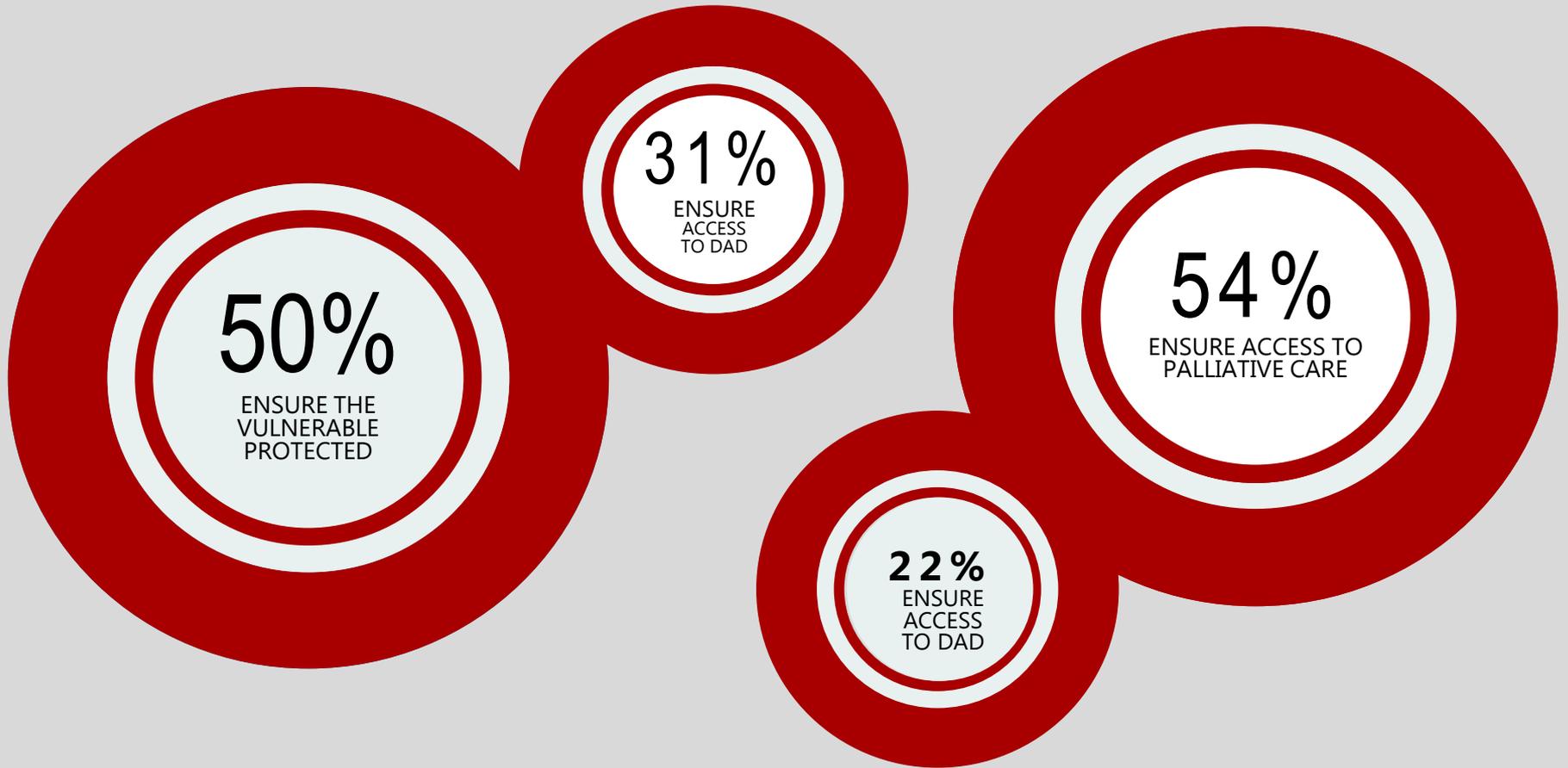
Whenever it is requested

10%

The law should not allow ...under any circumstances

# What is more important?

Trade offs favour protecting the vulnerable and ensuring access to palliative care



# THE MEDICAL COMMUNITY



51%

ONLY A DOCTOR SHOULD  
ADMINISTER

67%

TWO OR MORE  
PEOPLE OR  
COMMITTEE

66%

PHYSICIANS NOT  
OBLIGATED IF AGAINST  
MORAL BELIEFS

# Other Key findings

1

**Only 35% of Canadians feel that medical professionals should be obligated** to assist in death, if it is opposed to their morality, and only 32% feel that religious hospices should also be required regardless of their religious beliefs

2

**65% of Canadians say that MPs should base the decision to support legislation on their constituents**, and **only 9% say they should follow their party**

3

**44% of Canadians believe that assisted death is in conflict with the Hippocratic oath**, to cause no harm, and **37% see assisted death as a means for governments to reduce health care costs**

4

**57% of Canadians** who had personal experience with a loved one in palliative care, said **they suffered**, even though they rate palliative care standards highly



Thank You