



Canadians' Attitudes Towards Euthanasia

Commissioned Research
Conducted for:
LifeCanada

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INTRODUCTION

The survey was conducted on behalf of LifeCanada by telephone among a representative sample of 1,014 adult Canadians between October 6 and 13, 2009.

The survey looks at Canadians' attitudes towards euthanasia, such as support for legalizing euthanasia; concern about elderly feeling pressured to accept euthanasia, in order to reduce health care costs; concern that legalizing euthanasia in Canada will lead to a number of sick, disabled or elderly persons being euthanized without their consent; and preferred priority for government – investing in more or better palliative/hospice care or legalizing euthanasia.

The margin of error for a sample of 1,014 is 3.1 percentage points, 19 times out of 20. The reader is cautioned that margins of error for smaller subsamples are larger.

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

The findings of the research reveal that although Canadians express majority support for legalizing euthanasia with consent from the patient, majorities also express concern that the elderly will feel pressured to accept euthanasia to control health care costs and that a significant number of people who are sick, disabled or elderly will be euthanized without their consent. Furthermore, when asked to choose between two options, which should be the greater priority for the government, Canadians prefer, by an almost four-to-one margin, investing in more and better palliative and hospice care than in legalizing euthanasia.

The results also indicate that concerns over the legalizing of euthanasia are at majority levels among those who express tentative support for legalization. Moreover, on the issue that a significant number of the sick, disabled or elderly will be euthanized without their consent, a majority of those who express strong support for legalization also express concern that this will happen if euthanasia is legalized in Canada. Also, among those who express tentative support for legalizing euthanasia, a large majority think the government should place a greater priority on investing in more and better palliative and hospice care than on legalizing euthanasia.

Below are highlights from the research:

- A majority of six in ten Canadians (61%) support legally permitting a doctor or caregiver to euthanize someone with their consent. Support is highest in Quebec (75%) and lowest in Atlantic Canada (52%).
- Almost six in ten Canadians (56%) express some concern that elderly people will feel pressured to accept euthanasia, in order to reduce health care costs.
- Even among those who express tentative support for legalizing euthanasia, a slight majority (53%) express concern that elderly people will feel pressured to accept euthanasia.
- Hence, the finding that Quebecers, who are most likely to support legalizing euthanasia, are among the most likely to express concern that the elderly will feel pressured to accept euthanasia (65%).
- Seven in ten Canadians (70%) express some concern that, if euthanasia were legalized in Canada, it would lead to a significant number of sick, disabled, or elderly persons being euthanized without their consent, including four in ten (41%) who are very concerned about this happening.

- Even among those who express strong and tentative support for legalizing euthanasia, majorities are concerned that legalization would lead to a significant number of sick, disabled or elderly persons being euthanized without their consent (55% and 72%, respectively).
- Hence, the finding that strongly expressed concern about this happening is highest in Quebec – the region where support for legalizing euthanasia is highest (52% vs. 41% in Canada in general).
- When asked which of two options should be the greater priority for the government, Canadians choose by a margin of almost four-to-one, investing in more and better palliative and hospice care (69%) over legalizing euthanasia (18%).
- Even among those who express tentative support for legalizing euthanasia, a large majority (70%) prefer that government place a greater priority on investing in more and better palliative and hospice care.
- Majorities across the country think the greater priority for the government should be investing in more and better palliative and hospice care, but this view is highest in Atlantic Canada (80%) and lowest in Quebec (55%).
- There is a preference for investing in more and better palliative and hospice care across all demographic groups, but this view is higher among Canadians aged 45 and older.

SUPPORT FOR LEGALIZING EUTHANASIA

A majority of six in ten Canadians support legally permitting a doctor or caregiver to euthanize someone with their consent. Support is highest in Quebec and lowest in Atlantic Canada.

In this question, Canadians were told that, in Canada, euthanasia is against the law. By euthanasia, we mean the use of lethal means, such as a drug injection, overdose or poisoning to take the life of someone who is sick, depressed, elderly or disabled.

When Canadians are asked if they support or oppose legally permitting a doctor or caregiver to euthanize someone with their consent, six in ten (61%) are supportive, while one-third (33%) are opposed. The proportion who strongly support this view (25%) outweighs the number who are strongly opposed (19%). Four percent offer no opinion.

Majorities across the country support legally permitting a doctor or caregiver to euthanize someone with their consent, but this view is highest in Quebec (75%) and lowest in Atlantic Canada (52%). This view is also higher among Canadians aged 30 to 59, and lower among both the youngest and oldest subgroups.

Looking at party affiliation, support for legally permitting a doctor or caregiver to euthanize someone with their consent is higher among Bloc Québécois (77%), Green Party (74%) and NDP (70%) supporters, and lower among Conservative supporters (54%) and undecided voters (53%).

Degree of support for legalizing euthanasia

October 2009

	%
Strongly support	25
Somewhat support	36
Somewhat oppose	14
Strongly oppose	19
Depends	1
DK/NA	4

Q.1C In Canada, euthanasia is against the law. By euthanasia, we mean the use of lethal means, such as a drug injection, overdose or poisoning to take the life of someone who is sick, depressed, elderly or disabled. Do you strongly support, somewhat support, somewhat oppose or strongly oppose legally permitting a doctor or caregiver to euthanize someone with their consent?

CONCERN OVER THE ELDERLY FEELING PRESSURED TO ACCEPT EUTHANASIA

Almost six in ten Canadians express some concern that elderly people will feel pressured to accept euthanasia, in order to reduce health care costs. Moreover, even among those who express tentative support for legalizing euthanasia, a slight majority express concern that this will happen.

In this question, Canadians were told that governments in Canada are trying to find ways to limit the rising cost of health care. We also have an aging population and older people tend to have more health needs.

When Canadians are asked how concerned they are that, if euthanasia were legalized in Canada, elderly people would feel pressured to accept euthanasia, in order to reduce health care costs, almost six in ten (56%) express concern, while four in ten (40%) are not concerned. The proportion who are very concerned (30%) slightly outweighs the proportion who are not all concerned (26%). Five percent offer no opinion.

Concern over the elderly feeling pressured to accept euthanasia varies across the country. Majorities of residents in Quebec (65%), Atlantic Canada (62%) and Ontario (55%) express concern. It is noteworthy that Quebecers, who are most likely to support legalizing euthanasia, are among the most likely to express concern that the elderly will feel pressured to accept euthanasia. Residents of the Prairies (47% are concerned, 51% are not) and British Columbia (47% are concerned, 40% are not) are divided in their concern about this issue.

Concern over this issue is higher among older Canadians aged 45 and older. It is notable that those aged 45 to 59 are among the most likely to support legalizing euthanasia. Concern is also higher among women and those with the lowest education.

Looking at political affiliation, concern over the elderly feeling pressured to accept euthanasia is higher among Bloc Québécois supporters (63%) – who are most in favour of legalizing euthanasia – and undecided voters (63%). Concern is lower among NDP (52%) and Liberal (51%) supporters.

Concern over the elderly feeling pressured to accept euthanasia varies with support for legalizing euthanasia. Concern is higher among those who strongly (74%) or somewhat (75%) oppose legalizing euthanasia than among those who are somewhat (53%) or strongly (38%) supportive. However, it should be noted that even among those who express tentative support, a slight majority express concern about this issue.

Degree of concern over elderly feeling pressured to accept euthanasia

October 2009

	%
Very concerned	30
Somewhat concerned	26
Not very concerned	14
Not at all concerned	26
DK/NA	5

Degree of concern over elderly feeling pressured to accept euthanasia

By support/oppose legalizing euthanasia October 2009

	Strongly support	Somewhat support	Somewhat oppose	Strongly oppose
	%	%	%	%
Very concerned	20	19	39	57
Somewhat concerned	18	34	36	17
Not very concerned	11	21	9	6
Not at all concerned	48	23	14	15
DK/NA	2	3	3	6

Q.2C Governments in Canada are trying to find ways to limit the rising cost of health care. We also have an aging population and older people tend to have more health needs. If euthanasia were legalized in Canada, how concerned are you that elderly people would feel pressured to accept euthanasia, in order to reduce health care costs? Are you very, somewhat, not very or not at all concerned that this would happen?

CONCERN THAT SICK/DISABLED/ELDERLY WILL BE EUTHANIZED WITHOUT CONSENT

Seven in ten Canadians express some concern that, if euthanasia were legalized in Canada, it would lead to a significant number of sick, disabled or elderly persons being euthanized without their consent, including four in ten who are very concerned about this happening. Moreover, even among those who strongly support legalizing euthanasia, a majority are concerned that this would happen.

In this question, Canadians were told that euthanasia with consent from the patient has been legal in the Netherlands for many years. However, there have been reports from doctors that, in the Netherlands, about 1,000 people per year have been euthanized without having given their consent.

When Canadians are asked how concerned they are that, if euthanasia were legalized in Canada, it would lead to a significant number of sick, disabled or elderly persons being euthanized without their consent, seven in ten (70%) express concern, while one-quarter (25%) are not concerned. The proportion who are very concerned (41%) is almost four times greater than the number who are not all concerned (11%). Four percent offer no opinion.

Majorities across the country express overall concern that legalizing euthanasia in Canada would lead to a significant number of sick, disabled or elderly persons being euthanized without their consent. However, overall concern is lower in British Columbia (57%). It is noteworthy that strongly expressed concern about this happening is highest in Quebec – the region where support for legalizing euthanasia is highest – (52% are very concerned) and lowest in British Columbia (29%).

Overall concern is higher among those with lower household incomes. Strongly expressed concern is higher among Canadians aged 60 and older, those with less education and those living in smaller communities.

Looking at political affiliation, overall concern that legalizing euthanasia in Canada would lead to a significant number of sick, disabled or elderly persons being euthanized without their consent is higher among undecided voters (76%) and NDP supporters (74%). It is lower among Bloc Québécois (67%) and Liberal (66%) supporters. It is noteworthy that strongly expressed concern is higher among Bloc Québécois supporters (51% are very concerned) – who express the highest support for legalizing euthanasia – and undecided voters (49%).

Overall concern that legalizing euthanasia in Canada would lead to a significant number of sick, disabled or elderly persons being euthanized without their consent varies with support for legalizing euthanasia. Overall concern is higher among those who strongly (85%) or somewhat (85%) oppose legalizing euthanasia than among those who are somewhat (72%) or strongly (55%)

supportive. However, it should be noted that even among those who express strong support for legalizing euthanasia, a majority express overall concern about this issue.

Degree of concern that sick/disabled/elderly will be euthanized without their consent

October 2009

	%
Very concerned	41
Somewhat concerned	29
Not very concerned	14
Not at all concerned	11
DK/NA	4

Degree of concern that sick/disabled/elderly will be euthanized without their consent

By support/oppose legalizing euthanasia October 2009

	Strongly support	Somewhat support	Somewhat oppose	Strongly oppose
	%	%	%	%
Very concerned	28	31	55	73
Somewhat concerned	27	41	30	12
Not very concerned	18	19	6	5
Not at all concerned	23	8	8	6
DK/NA	4	1	2	4

Q.3C Euthanasia with consent from the patient has been legal in the Netherlands for many years. However, there have been reports from doctors that in the Netherlands about 1,000 people per year have been euthanized without having given their consent. If euthanasia were legalized in Canada, how concerned are you that it would lead to a significant number of sick, disabled or elderly persons being euthanized without their consent? Are you very, somewhat, not very or not at all concerned that this would happen?

PALLIATIVE/HOSPICE CARE VERSUS EUTHANASIA

Seven in ten Canadians think that the government should place a greater priority on more and better palliative and hospice care compared to only two in ten who think the focus should be on legalizing euthanasia. Even among those who express tentative support for legalizing euthanasia, a large majority prefer focusing on more and better palliative and hospice care.

In this question, Canadians were told that palliative and hospice care can offer alternatives for euthanasia for the terminally ill by providing pain management, comfort care, and relief of suffering until natural death.

When asked which of two options should be the greater priority for the government, Canadians choose by a margin of almost four-to-one, investing in more and better palliative and hospice care (69%) over legalizing euthanasia (18%). Five percent choose both options, two percent say neither and six percent offer no opinion.

Majorities across the country think the greater priority for the government should be investing in more and better palliative and hospice care, but this view is highest in Atlantic Canada (80%) and lowest in Quebec (55%). This view is also the most preferred across all demographic groups, but this view is higher among Canadians aged 45 and older, and lower among those with less than a high school education.

Looking at political affiliation, majorities across all parties think the greater priority for government should be investing in more and better palliative and hospice care, but this view is higher among Conservative supporters (74%) and lowest among Bloc Québécois supporters (53%).

Preference for government investing in more and better palliative and hospice care rather than in legalizing euthanasia varies with support for legalizing euthanasia. Among those who strongly or somewhat oppose legalizing euthanasia, overwhelming majorities prefer that government place a greater priority on investing in more and better palliative and hospice care (94% and 90%, respectively). Moreover, among those who are somewhat supportive of legalizing euthanasia, a large majority also prefer this option (70%). Among those who are very supportive of legalizing euthanasia, opinion is divided between investing in more and better palliative and hospice care and legalizing euthanasia (43% vs. 38%).

Greater priority for government – palliative/hospice care or legalizing euthanasia?

October 2009

	%
Investing in more/better palliative/hospice care	69
Legalizing euthanasia	18
Both equally	5
Neither	2
DK/NA	6

Greater priority for government – palliative/hospice care or legalizing euthanasia?

By support/oppose legalizing euthanasia October 2009

	Strongly support	Somewhat support	Somewhat oppose	Strongly oppose
	%	%	%	%
Investing in more/better palliative/hospice care	43	70	90	94
Legalizing euthanasia	38	16	5	3
Both equally	10	7	1	–
Neither	2	2	2	1
DK/NA	8	4	2	3

Q.4C Palliative and hospice care can offer alternatives to euthanasia for the terminally ill by providing pain management, comfort care and relief of suffering until natural death. Which of the following should be the greater priority for the government ...?