



## Canadians' Attitudes towards End-of-life Issues

*Prepared for:*  
LifeCanada

April 2, 2013

Environics Research Group  
336 MacLaren Street  
Ottawa, ON K2P 0M6

P7333

## Table of contents

Executive summary .....	1
Detailed findings .....	2
Opinions about legalizing assisted suicide .....	2
Opinions about legalizing euthanasia .....	3
Appendices:	
A. Research methodology	
B. Survey instruments	

## Executive summary

### Background

This survey was conducted on behalf of LifeCanada to look at Canadians’ attitudes towards end-of-life issues, including views about legalizing physician-assisted suicide and euthanasia.

The questions were asked as part of Environics’ National Omnibus survey. Telephone interviews were conducted with a representative sample of 2,008 adult Canadians, between March 5-10 and 18-24, 2013. The margin of error for a sample of 2,008 is plus or minus 2.2 percentage points, 19 times out of 20. The reader is cautioned that the margin of error is larger for subsamples of the total population.

Unless otherwise noted, all results throughout this report are expressed as a percentage. A more detailed description of the methodology used to conduct this study is presented at the back of this report, along with a copy of the questionnaire.

Key highlights from the research are presented below.

### Key findings

- Canadians are about twice as likely to support (63%) as to oppose (32%) a law allowing physician-assisted suicide in Canada. Support is slightly lower for legalizing euthanasia (55% vs. 40% who oppose it), which is likely due in part to providing respondents with information about the rate of euthanasia deaths occurring without patient consent in Belgium.
- In fact, relatively few Canadians are decisively in favour of legalizing these issues (29% in the case of assisted suicide and 18% in the case of euthanasia). Many of those expressing support do so with some hesitancy (i.e., say they “somewhat” support it), likely reflecting the concerns people have about such controversial topics.
- Support for assisted suicide is highest in B.C. (where the Supreme Court recently struck down the law against physician-assisted suicides), while support for euthanasia is highest in Quebec. Strong opposition to legalizing both issues is consistently higher among allophones and Canadians with lower socio-economic status (less education and lower incomes). Strong opposition to euthanasia is also higher among older Canadians and those with a physical or mental disability.

## Detailed findings

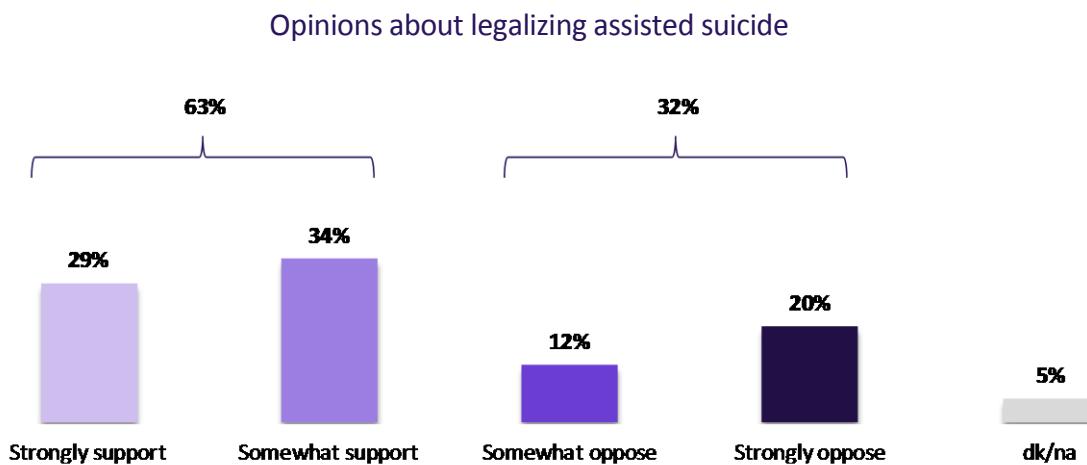
### Opinions about legalizing assisted suicide

A majority of Canadians support a law allowing physician-assisted suicide, although only three in ten are strongly in favour, a proportion that is higher in B.C. than elsewhere.

As background to the first question, Canadians were informed that it is currently illegal in Canada for doctors to help their patients commit suicide, either by providing the knowledge or means to do so. When asked how they would feel if a law were proposed in Canada allowing doctors to assist patients in committing suicide, Canadians are about twice as likely to support (63%) as oppose (32%) it.

This is broadly consistent with other public opinion research conducted over the past couple of years indicating majority support for legalizing assisted suicide in the case of terminally ill patients, although the wording of the current question is not limited to this specific circumstance.

At the same time, the detailed results suggest some uncertainty about the issue: while three in ten (29%) strongly support such a law and two in ten (20%) strongly oppose it, almost half of Canadians are more tentative in their views (34% somewhat support and 12% somewhat oppose it). The remaining five percent do not state an opinion.



- Q. *Currently, it is illegal in Canada for doctors to help their patients commit suicide, either by providing the knowledge or means to do so. If it were proposed in Canada, would you strongly support, somewhat support, somewhat oppose or strongly oppose a law allowing doctors to assist patients in committing suicide?*

Strong opposition to legalizing assisted suicide is most evident among younger Canadians (28% of those aged 18 to 29), allophones (35%), those without a high school education (33%) and those in the lowest income bracket (31%).

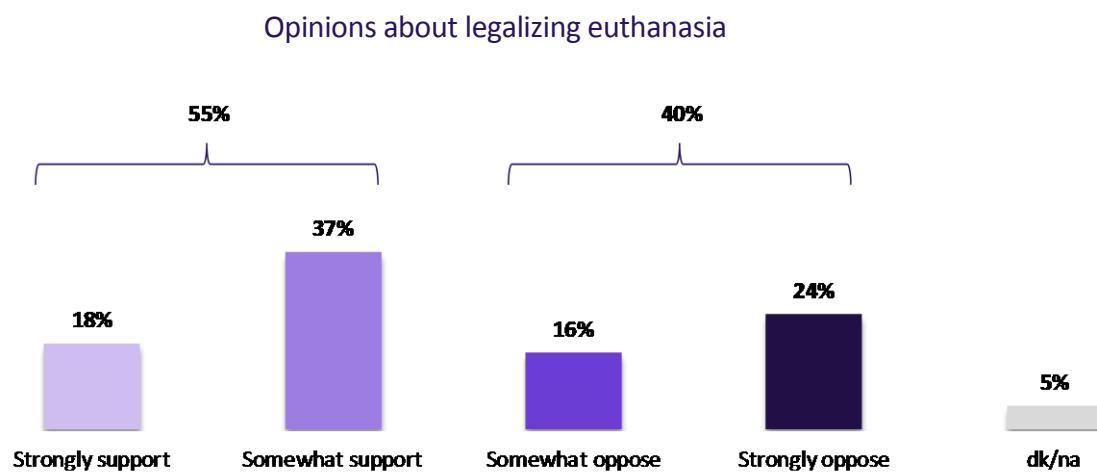
Strong support for making assisted suicide legal is highest in B.C. (41%), which is likely directly related to the 2012 B.C. Supreme Court decision to strike down the illegality of physician-assisted deaths (this decision is now before the B.C. Court of Appeals).

## Opinions about legalizing euthanasia

Despite information about euthanasia deaths occurring without patient consent, a majority of Canadians support legalizing euthanasia in Canada, although only one in five are strongly in favour.

As background to the second question, Canadians were informed that, while euthanasia has been legal in Belgium since 2002 with an explicit request from a patient with a serious illness, a recent study found that almost one-third of euthanasia deaths occur without this consent. Despite this, a majority (55%) of Canadians say they would support a law in Canada allowing doctors to euthanize, compared to four in ten (40%) who are opposed (the remaining 5% did not provide an opinion).

As with views about assisted suicide, there is some uncertainty about this issue. The bulk of those who favour euthanasia “somewhat” support the idea (37%) rather than “strongly” support it (18%).



*Q. The next question concerns euthanasia, whereby a doctor puts a patient to death in order to relieve their suffering. Euthanasia has been legal in Belgium since 2002 and requires an explicit request from the patient who has a serious illness. Despite this requirement, a Belgian study found that almost one-third of euthanasia deaths occur without the patient's consent. If similar legislation was proposed in Canada, would you strongly support, somewhat support, somewhat oppose or strongly oppose a law allowing doctors to euthanize their patients?*

Strong opposition to legalizing euthanasia is most evident among allophones (40%), older Canadians (35% of those aged 60 or over), those without a high school education (32%) and those in the lowest income bracket (32%). Canadians with a physical or mental disability are also more likely to strongly oppose euthanasia (29% vs. 23% of others).

Strong support for making euthanasia legal is highest in Quebec (23%) and among men (21% vs. 16% of women).



## Research methodology

## RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

The results are based on omnibus questions placed on Environics' National Omnibus survey, conducted with a representative sample of 2,008 adult Canadians between March 5-10 and 18-24, 2013.

### Question design

The questions were designed by senior Environics researchers in conjunction with representatives from LifeCanada. The questions were pre-tested as part of the overall survey prior to being finalized.

### Sample selection

The sampling method was designed to complete approximately 2,000 interviews within households randomly selected across Canada. The sample is drawn in such a way that it represents the Canadian population with the exception of those Canadians living in the Yukon, Northwest Territories or Nunavut, or in institutions (armed forces barracks, hospitals, prisons).

The sampling model relies on stratification of the population by 10 regions (Atlantic Canada, Montreal CMA, the rest of Quebec, Toronto CMA, the rest of Ontario, Manitoba, Saskatchewan, Alberta, Vancouver CMA and the rest of British Columbia) and by four community sizes (1,000,000 inhabitants or more, 100,000 to 1,000,000 inhabitants, 5,000 to 100,000 inhabitants, and under 5,000 inhabitants). The final sample was distributed as follows.

#### Sample distribution

	2011 Census* %	Weighted N	Unweighted N	Margin of Error**
CANADA	100	2,008	2,008	+/- 2.2
Atlantic Canada	7	143	252	+/- 6.2
Quebec	24	482	501	+/- 4.4
Ontario	38	770	500	+/- 4.4
Manitoba/Saskatchewan	6	130	251	+/- 6.2
Alberta	11	214	251	+/- 6.2
British Columbia	13	270	253	+/- 6.2

\* Canadians aged 18 years or over in 2011, excluding those in Nunavut, the Northwest Territories and the Yukon

\*\* In percentage points, at the 95% confidence interval

Environics uses a sampling method in which sample is generated using the RDD (random digit dialling) technique. Samples are generated using a database of active phone ranges. These ranges are made up of a series of contiguous blocks of 100 contiguous phone numbers and are revised three to four times per year after a thorough analysis of the most recent edition of an electronic phonebook. Each number generated is processed through an appropriate series of validation procedures before it is retained as part of a sample. Each number generated is looked up in a recent electronic phonebook database to retrieve geographic location, business indicator and "do not call" status. The postal code for listed numbers is verified for accuracy and compared against a list of valid codes for the sample stratum. Non-

listed numbers are assigned a “most probable” postal code based on the data available for all listed numbers in the phone exchange. This sample selection technique ensures that both unlisted numbers and numbers listed after the directory publication are included in the sample.

## Telephone interviewing

Interviewing for this survey was conducted at Environics’ central facilities in Toronto. Field supervisors were present at all times to ensure accurate interviewing and recording of responses. Ten percent of each interviewer’s work was unobtrusively monitored for quality control in accordance with the standards set out by the Marketing Research and Intelligence Association (MRIA). A minimum of five calls were made to a household before classifying it as a “no answer.” From within each household contacted, respondents 18 years of age and older were screened for random selection using the “most recent birthday” method. The use of this technique produces results that are as valid and effective as enumerating all persons within a household and selecting one randomly.

## Survey instruments

## LifeCanada 2013 Poll Questions – Euthanasia FINAL Questions

### NATIONAL SAMPLE OF 2,000 CANADIANS (18 years plus)

1. Currently, it is illegal in Canada for doctors to help their patients commit suicide, either by providing the knowledge or means to do so. If it were proposed in Canada, would you strongly support, somewhat support, somewhat oppose or strongly oppose a law allowing doctors to assist patients in committing suicide?

01 – Strongly support  
02 – Somewhat support  
03 – Somewhat oppose  
04 – Strongly oppose  
99 – DK/NA

2. The next question concerns euthanasia, whereby a doctor puts a patient to death in order to relieve their suffering.

Euthanasia has been legal in Belgium since 2002 and requires an explicit request from the patient who has a serious illness. Despite this requirement, a Belgian study found that almost one-third of euthanasia deaths occur without the patient's consent. If similar legislation was proposed in Canada, would you strongly support, somewhat support, somewhat oppose or strongly oppose a law allowing doctors to euthanize their patients?

01 – Strongly support  
02 – Somewhat support  
03 – Somewhat oppose  
04 – Strongly oppose  
99 – DK/NA

### PLACE IN DEMOGRAPHICS SECTION:

3. Does a physical or mental condition **or** health problem **reduce the amount or the kind of activity** you can do?

01 – Yes  
02 – No  
99 – DK/NA

1. Actuellement, il est illégal pour les médecins canadiens d'aider leurs patients à se suicider, que ce soit en leur fournissant les connaissances ou les moyens pour le faire. Si une loi permettant aux médecins d'aider leurs patients à se suicider était proposée au Canada, seriez-vous tout à fait pour, plutôt pour, plutôt contre ou tout à fait contre une telle loi? [NOTER UNE RÉPONSE]

01 – Tout à fait pour  
02 – Plutôt pour  
03 – Plutôt contre  
04 – Tout à fait contre  
99 – NSP/SR

2. La prochaine question porte sur l'euthanasie, où un médecin provoque le décès d'un patient afin de soulager ses souffrances.

L'euthanasie est légale en Belgique depuis 2002 et nécessite une demande explicite du patient souffrant d'une maladie grave. Malgré cette exigence, une étude belge a démontré que près du tiers des décès par euthanasie se sont produits sans le consentement du patient. Si un projet de loi similaire était proposé au Canada, seriez-vous tout à fait pour, plutôt pour, plutôt contre ou tout à fait contre une loi permettant aux médecins d'euthanasier leurs patients? [NOTER UNE RÉPONSE]

01 – Tout à fait pour  
02 – Plutôt pour  
03 – Plutôt contre  
04 – Tout à fait contre  
99 – NSP/SR

*PLACE IN DEMOGRAPHICS SECTION:*

3. Est-ce qu'une affection physique ou mentale **ou** un problème de santé **réduit la quantité ou le type d'activité** que vous pouvez faire? [NOTER UNE RÉPONSE]

01 – Oui  
02 – Non  
99 – NSP/SR