



## Canadians' Attitudes Towards Euthanasia

Commissioned Research  
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**LifeCanada**

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## **INTRODUCTION**

The survey was conducted on behalf of LifeCanada by telephone among a representative sample of 2,000 adult Canadians, between September 13 to 25, 2011. The survey was done in conjunction with Environics' National Omnibus survey.

The survey looks at Canadians' attitudes towards and concerns about euthanasia.

The margin of error for a sample of 2,000 is 2.2 percentage points, 19 times out of 20. The reader is cautioned that margins of error for smaller subsamples are larger.

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## EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

- When Canadians were informed about palliative and hospice care two-thirds (66%) of Canadians think the government should place a high priority on improved access to palliative care.
- Majorities across all regions of the country think improved access to palliative care should be a high priority for the government, but this view is lower than average in the Prairies (61%).
- When informed about elder abuse, a large majority of three-quarters (76%) of Canadians express concern that elderly people in abusive situations would be pressured to consent to euthanasia. It is notable that the proportion of Canadians who are very concerned about this is more than four times greater than the number who are not at all concerned.
- Large majorities of seven in ten or more in all areas of the country express concern that elderly people in abusive situations would be pressured to consent to euthanasia. Residents of Quebec are more likely than average to be very concerned about this issue (45% vs. 40% national average).
- When Canadians were informed that euthanasia with consent has been legal in the Netherlands for many years, but that doctors have reported that 550 people each year are euthanized without their consent, three-quarters (74%) of Canadians express concern that the legalization of euthanasia would lead to a significant number of the sick, elderly or disabled people being euthanized without their consent.
- Concern is down four points from a similarly worded question in 2010, and the proportion who are not concerned is up five points.
- Large majorities across all regions express concern that the legalization of euthanasia would lead to a significant number of the sick, elderly or disabled people being euthanized without their consent. Since 2010, concern has declined in Manitoba/Saskatchewan (down 7 points), Quebec (down 7) and Ontario (down 5), with most of this decline coming among those who say they are very concerned.
- Eight in ten Canadians oppose euthanasia in cases where the patient does not give their consent.
- It should be noted that the proportion of Canadians who are strongly opposed to legalizing euthanasia without consent is 16 times higher than the number who express strong support.

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- Large majorities across the country are opposed to the legalization of euthanasia without the patient's consent, but this view is higher in Atlantic Canada (88%). Strong opposition is higher among residents of Manitoba/Saskatchewan (72%), Atlantic Canada (71%) and British Columbia (70%), and lowest in Quebec (55%), particularly among Montrealers (50%).

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## **PRIORITY FOR IMPROVED ACCESS TO PALLIATIVE CARE**

**Two-thirds of Canadians think the government should put a high priority on improved access to palliative care.**

In this question, Canadians were informed that palliative and hospice care can provide the terminally ill with pain management, emotional and comfort care, and relief of suffering at the end of life. They were also told that fewer than a third of Canadians needing palliative care actually receive it. They were then asked how much of a priority should improved access to palliative care be for the government.

Two-thirds (66%) of Canadians think the government should place a high priority on improved access to palliative care. Another three in ten (29%) think this should be a medium priority. Only four percent think this should be a low priority.

Majorities across all regions of the country think the government should place a high priority on improved access to palliative care, but this view is lower than average in the Prairies (61%).

Majorities in all demographic groups think improved access to palliative care should be a high priority for the government.

Women (72%) are more likely than men (59%) to think the government should place a high priority on improved access to palliative care.

Looking across age groups, those aged 45 and older (74%) are considerably more likely than younger Canadians, particularly those aged 18 to 29 (51%) to place a high priority on improved access to palliative care. However, few in any age group think this should be a low priority.

Looking at political affiliation, majorities of all affiliation think access to palliative care should be a high priority for the government, but this view is higher among NDP supporters (73%) and lower among Green Party (56%) and Conservative (60%) supporters.

The belief that the government should place a high priority on access to palliative care does not differ among strong supporters and strong opponents of legalizing euthanasia without a patient's consent. Seven in ten each (68%) of both strong supporters and strong opponents think improved access to palliative care should be a high priority for the government.

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**Priority for improved access to palliative care**

2011

	%
High	66
Medium	29
Low	4
DK/NA	1

By political affiliation

	Con	Lib	NDP	BQ	Green Party	Undecided
	%	%	%	%	%	%
High	60	65	73	67	56	68
Medium	32	31	23	27	43	27
Low	7	3	3	6	1	1
DK/NA	1	1	1	-	-	3

By attitudes toward legalizing euthanasia without consent

	Strongly support	Somewhat support	Somewhat oppose	Strongly oppose
	%	%	%	%
High	68	57	63	68
Medium	20	40	35	27
Low	10	1	2	4
DK/NA	2	2	*	1

\*Less than one percent

*Q.1 Palliative and hospice care can provide the terminally ill with pain management, emotional and comfort care, and relief of suffering at the end of life. Fewer than a third of Canadians needing palliative care actually receive it. In your opinion how much of a priority should improved access to palliative care be for the government? Should it be a high, medium or low priority?*

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## **CONCERN THAT ABUSED ELDERLY PEOPLE WOULD BE PRESSURED TO CONSENT TO EUTHANASIA**

### **Three-quarters of Canadians express concern that elderly people in abusive situations would be pressured to consent to euthanasia.**

Canadians were informed that elder abuse is abusive or controlling behaviour by a person in a position of trust – such as a family member or caregiver – that causes an older adult physical or emotional harm or loss of property or assets. Elder abuse is recognized as a growing problem in Canada. They were then asked if euthanasia were legalized in Canada, how concerned they are that elderly people in abusive situations would be pressured to consent to euthanasia.

A large majority of three-quarters of Canadians say they are very (40%) or somewhat (36%) concerned that elderly people in abusive situations would be pressured to consent to euthanasia. Two in ten are not very (13%) or not at all (9%) concerned.

It is notable that the proportion of Canadians who are very concerned about this is more than four times greater than the number who are not at all concerned.

Large majorities of seven in ten or more across the country express concern that elderly people in abusive situations would be pressured to consent to euthanasia. Residents of Quebec are more likely than average to be very concerned about this issue (45% vs. 40% national average).

Majorities of two-thirds or more across all demographic subgroups express concern that elderly people in abusive situations would be pressured to consent to euthanasia.

Women (78%) are more likely than men (73%) to be concerned about this issue. This is especially notable when looking at the numbers who say they are very concerned (45% vs. 35%, respectively).

Overall concern that elderly people in abusive situations would be pressured to consent to euthanasia does not vary significantly with age, with concern being as high among those aged 18 to 29 (78%) as it is among those aged 60 and older (77%). However, the number who are very concerned is higher than average among those aged 60 and older (46% vs. 40%, respectively).

Looking at political affiliation, large majorities across all party supporters express concern that elderly people in abusive situations would be pressured to consent to euthanasia. However, the proportion who are very concerned is lower than average among Green Party supporters (27% vs. 40% among all Canadians).

Concern that elderly people in abusive situations would be pressured to consent to euthanasia correlates somewhat to views on the legalization of euthanasia without a patient's consent. Those who are strongly opposed (81%) are more likely than those who are strongly supportive (67%) to express concern about this issue. However, it is notable that even among those who are strongly supportive of euthanasia without the patient's consent a majority of two-thirds are concerned that elderly people in abusive situations would be pressured to consent to euthanasia.

**Concern that elderly people in abusive situations would be pressured to consent to euthanasia**

2011

	%
Very concerned	40
Somewhat concerned	36
Not very concerned	13
Not at all concerned	9
DK/NA	2

By political affiliation

	Con	Lib	NDP	BQ	Green Party	Undecided
	%	%	%	%	%	%
Very concerned	43	37	41	45	27	42
Somewhat concerned	37	33	35	24	50	36
Not very concerned	10	14	15	22	12	9
Not at all concerned	8	13	8	4	10	8
DK/NA	1	2	1	5	1	5

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By attitudes toward legalizing euthanasia without consent

	<b>Strongly support</b>	<b>Somewhat support</b>	<b>Somewhat oppose</b>	<b>Strongly oppose</b>
	<b>%</b>	<b>%</b>	<b>%</b>	<b>%</b>
Very concerned	38	24	24	49
Somewhat concerned	29	50	44	32
Not very concerned	8	15	22	10
Not at all concerned	24	9	8	8
DK/NA	2	1	2	1

*Q.2 Elder abuse is abusive or controlling behaviour by a person in a position of trust – such as a family member or caregiver – that causes an older adult physical or emotional harm or loss of property or assets. Elder abuse is recognized as a growing problem in Canada. If euthanasia were legalized in Canada, how concerned are you that elder people in abusive situations would be pressured to consent to euthanasia? Are you very, somewhat, not very or not at all concerned that this would happen?*

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## **CONCERN SIGNIFICANT NUMBER OF SICK/DISABLED/ELDERLY WOULD BE EUTHANIZED WITHOUT CONSENT**

**Three-quarters of Canadians express concern that the legalization of euthanasia in Canada would lead to a significant number of sick, elderly or disabled people would be euthanized without their consent.**

Canadians were informed 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 550 people per year have been euthanized without having given their consent.

Canadians were asked how concerned are they that the legalization of euthanasia would lead to a significant number of sick, elderly or disabled people being euthanized without their consent. A large majority of three-quarters say they are very (41%) or somewhat (33%) concerned that this would happen, while one-quarter say they are not very (17%) or not at all (8%) concerned. Concern is down four points from a similarly worded question in 2010, and the proportion who are not concerned is up five points.

It is notable that the proportion of Canadians who are very concerned that the legalization of euthanasia would lead to a significant number of sick, elderly or disabled people being euthanized without their consent is five times greater than the number who are not at all concerned (41%, down 5 points vs. 8%, unchanged, respectively). However, there has been a slight decrease in the proportion who say they are very concerned.

Large majorities across the country express concern that the legalization of euthanasia would lead to a significant number of sick, elderly or disabled people being euthanized without their consent. Since 2010, concern has declined in Manitoba/Saskatchewan (down 7 points), Quebec (down 7) and Ontario (down 5), with most of this decline coming among those who say they are very concerned. Concern is essentially unchanged in other areas of the country.

Majorities across all demographic subgroups express overall concern that the legalization of euthanasia would lead to a significant number of sick, elderly or disabled people being euthanized without their consent.

Concern is higher among women (77%, down 6 points overall) than among men (70%). However, overall concern is down among women.

Overall concern that the legalization of euthanasia would lead to a significant number of sick, elderly or disabled people being euthanized without their consent does not vary significantly with age, with concern being as high among those aged 18 to 29 (69%) as it is among those aged

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60 and older (76%). However, the number who are very concerned is higher than average among those aged 60 and older (47% vs. 41%, respectively).

Looking at political affiliation, large majorities across all parties express concern that the legalization of euthanasia would lead to a significant number of sick, elderly or disabled people being euthanized without their consent. However, the proportion who say they are very concerned is higher than average among Conservative supporters (47%) and lower among Green Party supporters (26%). Since 2009, concern has declined among Liberal (down 10) and Green Party (down 7) supporters.

Concern that the legalization of euthanasia would lead to a significant number of sick, elderly or disabled people being euthanized without their consent directly correlates with attitudes toward the legalization of euthanasia without consent. Overall concern increases from 62 percent among those who express strong support for legalizing euthanasia without consent to 80 percent among those who are strongly opposed. In contrast, the proportions who are not concerned declines from 38 percent among those who express strong support toward legalizing euthanasia without consent to only 19 percent among those who are strongly opposed.

**Concern that significant number of sick, disabled or elderly would be euthanized without their consent**

2009-2010

	2009	2010	2011
	%	%	
Very concerned	41	46	41
Somewhat concerned	29	32	33
Not very concerned	14	12	17
Not at all concerned	11	8	8

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**Concern that significant number of sick, disabled or elderly would be euthanized without their consent**

By political affiliation 2011

	Con	Lib	NDP	BQ	Green Party	Undecided
	%	%	%	%	%	%
Very concerned	47	36	37	50	26	44
Somewhat concerned	30	32	37	30	42	32
Not very concerned	15	20	18	12	24	13
Not at all concerned	6	11	8	6	7	8

By attitudes toward legalizing euthanasia without consent 2011

	Strongly support	Somewhat support	Somewhat oppose	Strongly oppose
	%	%	%	%
Very concerned	42	21	23	51
Somewhat concerned	20	45	46	29
Not very concerned	13	25	25	13
Not at all concerned	25	8	6	6

*Q.3 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 550 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, elderly or disabled people being euthanized without their consent? Are you very, somewhat, not very or not at all concerned that this would happen?*

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## **SUPPORT FOR LEGALIZATION OF EUTHANASIA WITHOUT CONSENT**

**Eight in ten Canadians oppose legalizing euthanasia when the patient does not give their consent, including two-thirds who express strong opposition.**

Canadians express very little support for the legalization of euthanasia when a patient does not offer their consent.

Eight in ten Canadians strongly (64%) or somewhat (18%) oppose euthanasia in cases where the patient does not give their consent. Just over one in ten strongly (4%) or somewhat (10%) support this view. Four percent offer no opinion.

It is notable that the proportion of Canadians who are strongly opposed to legalizing euthanasia without consent is 16 times higher than the number who express strong support.

Large majorities across the country are opposed to the legalization of euthanasia without the patient's consent, but this view is higher in Atlantic Canada (88%). Strong opposition is higher among residents of Manitoba/Saskatchewan (72%), Atlantic Canada (71%) and British Columbia (70%), and lowest in Quebec (55%), particularly among Montrealers (50%).

Although overall opposition to the legalization of euthanasia without the patient's consent is at similar levels among men and women, strong opposition is higher among women (67%) than among men (60%).

It is notable that opposition to the legalization of euthanasia without consent does not vary significantly with age, with concern being as high among those aged 18 to 29 (78%) as it is among those aged 60 and older (77%).

Looking at political affiliation, large majorities across all party supporters oppose the legalization of euthanasia without the patient's consent. However, strong opposition is higher among Conservative supporters (69%) and lower among Bloc Québécois supporters (52%).

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**Support for legalizing euthanasia without consent**

2011

	%
Strongly support	4
Somewhat support	10
Somewhat oppose	18
Strongly oppose	64
DK/NA	4

By political affiliation 2011

	Con	Lib	NDP	BQ	Green Party	Undecided
	%	%	%	%	%	%
Strongly support	4	4	5	5	3	3
Somewhat support	9	10	11	12	17	8
Somewhat oppose	16	19	18	28	14	18
Strongly oppose	69	61	63	52	65	62
DK/NA	2	5	3	2	-	9

*Q.4 Do you strongly support, somewhat support, somewhat oppose or strongly oppose legalizing euthanasia in cases where the patient does not give their consent?*

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## ATTITUDES TOWARD EUTHANASIA IN QUEBEC

- A majority of two-thirds (67%) of Quebecers think the government should place a high priority on improved access to palliative care.
- A large majority of three-quarters (76%) of Quebecers express concern that elderly people in abusive situations would be pressured to consent to euthanasia. Moreover, Quebecers are more likely than average to be very concerned about this issue (45% vs. 40%).
- A large majority of three-quarters (74%) of Quebecers express concern that legalizing euthanasia in Canada would lead to a significant number of sick, elderly and disabled people being euthanized without their consent. However, this figure is down since 2010 (down 7 points).
- A large majority of eight in ten (79%) Quebecers oppose the legalization of euthanasia in cases where the patient does not provide their consent. However, strong opposition is lowest in Quebec (55%), particularly among Montrealers (50%).

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## METHODOLOGY REPORT

The results are based on omnibus questions placed on an Environics' National Omnibus survey, conducted with a representative sample of adult Canadians between September 13 and 25, 2011.

### 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			
	2006 Census* %	Weighted N=2,000	Unweighted N=2,000	Margin of Error
CANADA	100	2,000	2,000	+/- 2.2%
Atlantic Canada	8	148	250	+/- 6.2%
Quebec	24	487	500	+/- 4.4%
Ontario	38	766	500	+/- 4.4%
Manitoba/Saskatchewan	4	130	250	+/- 6.2%
Alberta	10	204	250	+/- 6.2%
British Columbia	13	265	250	+/- 6.2%

\* Canadians aged 18 years or over in 2006, excluding those in Nunavut, the Northwest Territories and the Yukon

Environics uses a sampling method in which sample is generated using the RDD (random digit

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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.