



Should euthanasia be legalised in New Zealand?

The issue:

It has been over a year since the passing of Lecretia Seales. A proponent of euthanasia legislation, Lecretia fought a legal battle in 2015 to allow her doctor to end her life without prosecution after she was diagnosed with terminal brain cancer. Lecretia's story sparked a nationwide discourse about euthanasia. Although the issue surrounding euthanasia legalisation in New Zealand has been around for a few years, in recent months euthanasia has received increased media attention.

A recent petition, which has reached 22,000 signatures, is asking for this issue to be put to Parliament once again. Pro-euthanasia groups have also featured in the media in connection with arrests due to possession of drugs that are used in euthanasia in countries where assisted dying is legal. Arguments for and against euthanasia have come from healthcare workers, lawyers, politicians, people with terminal illnesses and the general public.

In order to gauge public opinion and support for the legalisation of euthanasia, Research New Zealand conducted a poll between 24 June and 15 July 2015 with a nationally representative sample of adult New Zealanders. We repeated the same poll between 04 October and 22 October 2016.

The poll questions:

- 1. Suppose a person has a painful, incurable disease. Do you think that doctors should be allowed by law to end the patient's life, if the patient requests it?*
- 2. Still thinking of that person with a painful, incurable disease, do you think that someone else, such as a close relative, should be allowed by law to help end the patient's life, if the patient requests it?*



Key results:

- ◆ Almost two-thirds (65 percent) of respondents to the October 2016 poll agreed that **doctors** should be allowed by law to help a terminally ill person end their life, if they requested this (Table 1). A further 22 percent did not agree that a doctor should be allowed to help a person end their life, while 13 percent were undecided.
- ◆ There has been little change in public opinion since June/July 2015.

Table 1: Agreement that it should be legal for doctors to assist with euthanasia

Q1. Suppose a person has a painful, incurable disease. Do you think that doctors should be allowed by law to end the patient's life, if the patient requests it?

	June/July 2015	October 2016
Unweighted base =	500	501
	%	%
Yes	67	65
No	24	22
Don't know	9	13
Don't care	0	0
Total	100	100

Total may not sum to 100% due to rounding.

- ◆ Support for **other people** being able to assist a terminally ill person end their life is more evenly divided, with 43 percent of respondents agreeing to this, compared to 46 percent disagreeing. A further 11 percent stated they were unsure.
- ◆ These results are also comparable to results recorded in June/July 2015.

Table 2: Agreement that it should be legal for other people, such as close relatives, to assist with euthanasia

Q2. Still thinking of that person with a painful, incurable disease, do you think that someone else, such as a close relative, should be allowed by law to help end the patient's life, if the patient requests it?

	June/July 2015	October 2016
Unweighted base =	500	501
	%	%
Yes	44	43
No	48	46
Don't know	8	11
Don't care	0	0
Total	100	100

Total may not sum to 100% due to rounding.



Demographic differences:

We have analysed the October 2016 results by a number of demographic variables, including age, gender, income, educational status and ethnicity. The results of this analysis are as follows:

- ◆ The only statistically significant difference between demographic sub-groups in regard to assisted euthanasia by **doctors** was in relation to educational status.
 - ◆ Respondents with tertiary qualifications (e.g. a Bachelor's degree or higher) were significantly **less likely** to agree that doctors should be allowed, by law, to help a terminally ill person end their life, if that person requested it (55 percent, compared with 68 percent of respondents whose highest qualification is a secondary school qualification, 71 percent of those with a polytechnic or trade qualification, and 78 percent of those with no qualifications). A similar trend was measured in June/July 2015.
- ◆ There was also a significant difference in opinion by educational status as to whether someone **other than a doctor** should be allowed to help a terminally ill person end their life, if that person requested it.
 - ◆ Respondents with tertiary qualifications were, again, significantly **less likely** than respondents with no qualifications to agree that someone other than a doctor should be allowed to help a terminally ill person end their life (37 percent, compared with 58 percent of those with no qualification).

There were no other significant differences by age, gender, income, or ethnicity.



Comment:

“We now have two comparable measures, approximately one year apart, with more or less the same results. The messages are clear. With about three times as many people in support as not, New Zealanders are clearly in favour of assisted euthanasia where a doctor is involved. In contrast, there is no clear majority for assisted euthanasia where others (non-professionals) are involved,” said Research New Zealand Director Emanuel Kalafatelis.

The Research New Zealand poll of 501 people aged 18 years and over was conducted by telephone between 04 October and 22 October 2016. The maximum margin of error is +/- 5.2 percent (at the 95 percent confidence level). The data has been weighted to ensure it is an accurate representation of the general population of New Zealand. The polls were not taken on behalf of any organization, but as part of Research New Zealand's monthly survey of attitudes and opinions.

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TABULATIONS

Results by demographic sub-groups

Table 3: Agreement by gender that it should be legal for doctors to assist with euthanasia

Q1. Suppose a person has a painful, incurable disease. Do you think that doctors should be allowed by law to end the patient's life, if the patient requests it?

Base =	October 2016	Male	Female
	501	232	269
	%	%	%
Yes	65	67	62
No	22	21	23
Don't know	13	11	15
Don't care	0	0	0
Total	100	100	100

The base numbers shown are unweighted counts.
Total may not sum to 100% due to rounding.

Table 4: Agreement by age that it should be legal for doctors to assist with euthanasia

Q1. Suppose a person has a painful, incurable disease. Do you think that doctors should be allowed by law to end the patient's life, if the patient requests it?

Unweighted base =	October 2016	18-34	35-54	55+
	501	61	129	311
	%	%	%	%
Yes	65	61	66	67
No	22	23	22	22
Don't know	13	16	12	11
Don't care	0	0	0	0
Total	100	100	100	100

The base numbers shown are unweighted counts.
Total may not sum to 100% due to rounding.

Table 5: Agreement by income that it should be legal for doctors to assist with euthanasia

Q1. Suppose a person has a painful, incurable disease. Do you think that doctors should be allowed by law to end the patient's life, if the patient requests it?

Unweighted base =	October 2016	Under \$40,000	\$40,000-\$80,000	\$80,000+	Don't know/Refused
	501	157	125	163	56
	%	%	%	%	%
Yes	65	63	67	66	63
No	22	24	22	21	20
Don't know	13	13	11	13	17
Don't care	0	0	0	0	0
Total	100	100	100	100	100

The base numbers shown are unweighted counts.
Total may not sum to 100% due to rounding.



Table 6: Agreement by highest qualification that it should be legal for doctors to assist with euthanasia

Q1. Suppose a person has a painful, incurable disease. Do you think that doctors should be allowed by law to end the patient's life, if the patient requests it?

	October 2016	None/No qualifications	Secondary school qualification	Polytechnic or trade qualification	Bachelor's degree or higher
Unweighted base =	501	58	147	128	167
	%	%	%	%	%
Yes	65	78	68	71	55
No	22	17	19	20	28
Don't know	13	4	13	10	17
Don't care	0	1	0	0	0
Total	100	100	100	100	100

The base numbers shown are unweighted counts.
Total may not sum to 100% due to rounding.

Table 7: Agreement by ethnicity that it should be legal for doctors to assist with euthanasia

Q1. Suppose a person has a painful, incurable disease. Do you think that doctors should be allowed by law to end the patient's life, if the patient requests it?

	October 2016	NZ European	Maori	Other
Unweighted base =	501	381	63	74
	%	%	%	%
Yes	65	66	62	60
No	22	20	26	23
Don't know	13	14	12	17
Don't care	0	0	0	0
Total	100	100	100	100

The base numbers shown are unweighted counts.
Total may not sum to 100% due to rounding.

Table 8: Agreement by gender that it should be legal for other people, like close relatives, to assist with euthanasia

Q2. Still thinking of that person with a painful, incurable disease, do you think that someone else, like a close relative, should be allowed by law to help end the patient's life, if the patient requests it?

	October 2016	Male	Female
Unweighted base =	501	232	269
	%	%	%
Yes	43	42	44
No	46	48	43
Don't know	11	10	12
Don't care	0	0	0
Total	100	100	100

The base numbers shown are unweighted counts.
Total may not sum to 100% due to rounding.



Table 9: Agreement by age that it should be legal for other people, like close relatives, to assist with euthanasia

Q2. Still thinking of that person with a painful, incurable disease, do you think that someone else, like a close relative, should be allowed by law to help end the patient's life, if the patient requests it?

	October 2016	18-34	35-54	55+
Unweighted base =	501	61	129	311
	%	%	%	%
Yes	43	53	41	39
No	46	35	48	50
Don't know	11	13	11	10
Don't care	0	0	0	1
Total	100	100	100	100

The base numbers shown are unweighted counts.
Total may not sum to 100% due to rounding.

Table 10: Agreement by income that it should be legal for other people, like close relatives, to assist with euthanasia

Q2. Still thinking of that person with a painful, incurable disease, do you think that someone else, like a close relative, should be allowed by law to help end the patient's life, if the patient requests it?

	October 2016	Under \$40,000	\$40,000-\$80,000	\$80,000+	Don't know/Refused
Unweighted base =	501	157	125	163	56
	%	%	%	%	%
Yes	43	48	40	44	34
No	46	42	48	46	47
Don't know	11	10	12	9	19
Don't care	0	0	1	0	0
Total	100	100	100	100	100

The base numbers shown are unweighted counts.
Total may not sum to 100% due to rounding.

Table 11: Agreement by highest qualification that it should be legal for other people, like close relatives, to assist with euthanasia

Q2. Still thinking of that person with a painful, incurable disease, do you think that someone else, like a close relative, should be allowed by law to help end the patient's life, if the patient requests it?

	October 2016	None/no qualifications	Secondary school qualification	Polytechnic or trade qualification	Bachelor's degree or higher
Unweighted base =	501	58	147	128	167
	%	%	%	%	%
Yes	43	58	48	41	37
No	46	36	42	46	51
Don't know	11	5	10	13	12
Don't care	0	1	0	1	0
Total	100	100	100	100	100

The base numbers shown are unweighted counts.
Total may not sum to 100% due to rounding.



Table 12: Agreement by ethnicity that it should be legal for other people, like close relatives, to assist with euthanasia

Q2. Still thinking of that person with a painful, incurable disease, do you think that someone else, like a close relative, should be allowed by law to help end the patient's life, if the patient requests it?

	October 2016	NZ European	Māori	Other
Unweighted base =	501	381	63	74
	%	%	%	%
Yes	43	40	53	38
No	46	48	39	50
Don't know	11	11	7	11
Don't care	0	0	0	0
Total	100	100	100	100

The base numbers shown are unweighted counts.

Total may not sum to 100% due to rounding.

Some respondents identify with more than one ethnicity.