



Should euthanasia be legalised in New Zealand?

The issue:

Over the past two months there has been an increase in media attention and public debate surrounding the legalisation of euthanasia in New Zealand. Specifically, politicians, lawyers, healthcare workers, people with terminal illnesses and the general public have been publicly debating whether a law should be passed that would allow doctors to assist terminally ill patients who would like to end their lives.

In order to gauge public opinion and support for the legalisation of euthanasia, we decided to conduct a poll with a nationally representative sample of adult New Zealanders between March and April 2015. For this poll we decided to use exactly the same question wording that a Department of Marketing, Massey University survey used in 2008.

The poll question:

The following questions were asked:

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, like a close relative, should be allowed by law to help end the patient's life, if the patient requests it?*

Key results:

The results to these questions are presented in the following tables:

Table 1: Agreement that euthanasia should be legal for doctors.

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 =	Total 501 %
Yes		74
No		20
Don't know		6
Don't care		0
Total		100

Total may not sum to 100% due to rounding.



Table 2: Agreement that euthanasia should be legal for other people like close relatives.

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?

	Unweighted base =	Total 501 %
Yes		51
No		41
Don't know		9
Don't care		0
Total		100

Total may not sum to 100% due to rounding.

- ◆ As shown in Table 1, three-in-four respondents (74 percent) believe that doctors should legally be able to euthanize terminally ill patients, if that patient has a painful incurable disease and requests their life to be ended. Twenty percent did not agree with this stance and six percent were unsure.

This result is comparable to the 2008 Massey University result. Seventy percent of the respondents in that survey agreed that doctors should legally be able to euthanize terminally ill patients, if that patient has a painful incurable disease and requests their life to be ended.

- ◆ In contrast, respondents in our poll were divided as to whether other people (e.g. close relatives) should be able to help end someone's life, given a similar situation. One-half (51 percent) agreed, while 41 percent disagreed. Nine percent were unsure (refer Table 2).

Again, this result is comparable to the 2008 Massey University result. Fifty-two percent of the respondents in that survey agreed that other people (e.g. close relatives) should be able to help end someone's life, given a situation in which a person had a painful incurable disease and requested their life to be ended.

Demographic differences:

We have analysed the results to these questions by a number of demographic variables including; age, gender, income, education and ethnicity. The results to this analysis are as follows:

- ◆ The only statistically significant difference between demographic sub-groups in regard to the legalisation of euthanasia for doctors was in relation to ethnicity.
 - ◆ Specifically, respondents who identified as New Zealand European or Pākehā were more likely than those of 'other' ethnicities to agree that doctors should be allowed, by law, to end a terminally ill patient's life if that patient requests it (77 percent, compared with 64 percent).



- ◆ There were also differences in opinion by ethnicity and by age, as to whether someone other than a doctor, should be allowed to help end a terminally ill patient's life, if that patient requests it.
- ◆ Younger respondents were more likely to agree that someone other than a doctor should be allowed to euthanize a terminally ill patient (60 percent of 18 to 34 year olds agreed with this, as did 54 percent of 35 to 54 year olds, compared with 39 percent of those aged 55 years or more).
- ◆ In contrast, one-half of all respondents who did not identify as Māori or New Zealand European (i.e. those of 'other' ethnicities), did not agree that a close relative should be allowed by law to help end a patient's life (49 percent, compared with 27 percent of Maori).

Comment:

"There is clearly significant support amongst New Zealanders for the legalisation of euthanasia for doctors. However, public opinion is divided as to whether or not anyone other than a doctor should be allowed by law to help end a terminally ill patient's life. Furthermore, our poll results are not 'one-off's' given that they mirror those of a Massey University survey conducted in 2008", said Research New Zealand Director, Emanuel Kalafatelis.

The Research New Zealand poll was conducted with 501 people aged 18 years and over, by telephone between the 23rd of March and 2nd of April 2015. The maximum margin of error is +/- 4.9 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 organisation, but as part of Research New Zealand's monthly survey of attitudes and opinions.

Contact: Emanuel Kalafatelis
Director
Research New Zealand Limited
P O Box 10-617
Wellington 6143
Ph. 04-462-6401 (DDI); 027-500-4401 (M)



TABULATIONS

Results by demographic sub-groups

Table 3: Agreement that euthanasia should be legal for doctors by gender.

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 =	Total 501 %	Male 251 %	Female 250 %
Yes	74	72	75
No	20	22	18
Don't know	6	5	7
Don't care	0	0	0
Total	100	100	100

Total may not sum to 100% due to rounding.

Table 4: Agreement that euthanasia should be legal for doctors by age.

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 =	Total 501 %	18-34 67 %	35-54 201 %	55+ 233 %
Yes	74	76	76	70
No	20	18	18	24
Don't know	6	6	6	6
Don't care	0	0	1	0
Total	100	100	100	100

Total may not sum to 100% due to rounding.

Table 5: Agreement that euthanasia should be legal for doctors by income.

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 =	Total 501 %	Under \$40,000 145 %	\$40,000- \$80,000 135 %	\$80,000+ 164 %	Don't know/refused 57 %
Yes	74	76	69	75	77
No	20	20	21	20	15
Don't know	6	3	10	5	6
Don't care	0	1	0	0	2
Total	100	100	100	100	100

Total may not sum to 100% due to rounding.



Table 6: Agreement that euthanasia should be legal for doctors by highest qualification.

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?

	Total	None/no qualifications	Secondary school qualification	Polytechnic or trade qualification	Bachelor's degree or higher	Other/Don't know
Unweighted base =	501	52	150	140	149	10**
	%	%	%	%	%	%
Yes	74	76	77	74	71	41
No	20	22	18	19	20	50
Don't know	6	2	5	7	8	9
Don't care	0	0	0	0	1	0
Total	100	100	100	100	100	100

Total may not sum to 100% due to rounding.

**Caution: low base number of respondents - results are indicative only.

Table 7: Agreement that euthanasia should be legal for doctors by ethnicity.

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?

	Total	NZEU	Māori	Other	Refused
Unweighted base =	501	370	47	115	3**
	%	%	%	%	%
Yes	74	77	75	64	84
No	20	15	25	33	16
Don't know	6	7	0	3	0
Don't care	0	1	0	0	0
Total	100	100	100	100	100

Total may not sum to 100% due to rounding.

**Caution: low base number of respondents - results are indicative only.

Table 8: Agreement that euthanasia should be legal for other people like close relatives by gender.

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?

	Total	Male	Female
Unweighted base =	501	251	250
	%	%	%
Yes	51	54	48
No	41	38	43
Don't know	9	8	9
Don't care	0	0	0
Total	100	100	100

Total may not sum to 100% due to rounding.



Table 9: Agreement that euthanasia should be legal for other people like close relatives by age.

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?

	Total	18-34	35-54	55+
Unweighted base =	501	67	201	233
	%	%	%	%
Yes	51	60	54	39
No	41	33	38	50
Don't know	9	7	8	10
Don't care	0	0	0	0
Total	100	100	100	100

Total may not sum to 100% due to rounding.

Table 10: Agreement that euthanasia should be legal for other people like close relatives by income.

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?

	Total	Under \$40,000	\$40,000-\$80,000	\$80,000+	Don't know/refused
Unweighted base =	501	145	135	164	57
	%	%	%	%	%
Yes	51	58	47	48	49
No	41	35	42	47	36
Don't know	9	7	11	6	15
Don't care	0	0	0	0	0
Total	100	100	100	100	100

Total may not sum to 100% due to rounding.

Table 11: Agreement that euthanasia should be legal for other people like close relatives by highest qualification.

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?

	Total	None/no qualifications	Secondary school qualification	Polytechnic or trade qualification	Bachelors degree or higher	Other/Don't know
Unweighted base =	501	52	150	140	149	10**
	%	%	%	%	%	%
Yes	51	49	59	45	48	27
No	41	49	32	44	44	57
Don't know	9	2	9	11	8	16
Don't care	0	0	0	0	0	0
Total	100	100	100	100	100	100

Total may not sum to 100% due to rounding.

**Caution: low base number of respondents - results are indicative only.



Table 12: Agreement that euthanasia should be legal for other people like close relatives by ethnicity.

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?

	Total	NZEU	Māori	Other	Refused
Unweighted base =	501	370	47	115	3**
	%	%	%	%	%
Yes	51	51	63	48	25
No	41	39	27	49	75
Don't know	9	9	10	3	0
Don't care	0	0	0	0	0
Total	100	100	100	100	100

Total may not sum to 100% due to rounding.

**Caution: low base number of respondents - results are indicative only.