

DOCTOR-ASSISTED SUICIDE

Canadians and Britons Would Allow Euthanasia Under Some Conditions

Respondents in the United States are more likely to question whether doctor-assisted suicide should be permitted at all.

[NEW YORK - Jul. 26, 2012] - Canadians and Britons are more likely to voice support for doctor-assisted suicide than Americans, a new Angus Reid Public Opinion poll has found.

In the online survey of representative national samples, 80 per cent of respondents in Canada and 77 per cent in Britain support allowing a doctor to—at the request of a competent, fully-informed, terminally ill patient—assist the patient in ending his or her life. The level of support for this notion is lower in the United States, at 56 per cent.

While three-in-four Britons and Canadians (76% and 75% respectively) believe doctor-assisted suicide should be allowed, but only under specific circumstances, just half of Americans (50%) concur. In fact, three-in-ten respondents in the United States (29%) believe doctor-assisted suicide should never be allowed, compared to 10 per cent in Canada and nine per cent in Britain.

Arguments

A majority of respondents in the three countries believe legalizing doctor-assisted suicide would both give people who are suffering an opportunity to ease their pain (CAN 86%, BRI 84%, USA 69%) and establish clearer guidelines for doctors to deal with end-of-life decisions (CAN 79%, BRI 77%, USA 58%).

Almost half of Americans (46%) believe legalizing doctor-assisted suicide would leave vulnerable people without sufficient legal protection. This view is shared by 37 per cent of Britons and 30 per cent of

KEY FINDINGS

- **80% of Canadians, 77% of Britons and 56% of Americans support allowing a doctor to—at the request of a competent, fully-informed, terminally ill patient—assist the patient in ending his or her life.**
- **46% of Americans, 37% of Britons and 30% of Canadians believe legalizing doctor-assisted suicide would leave vulnerable people without sufficient legal protection.**
- **38% of Canadians, 32% of Britons and 22% of Americans would allow a parent to end the life of his or her child who suffers from a severe form of a condition such as cerebral palsy.**

Full methodology details and topline results are at the end of this release.

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Canadians. The proportion of respondents who think legalizing doctor-assisted suicide would send the message that the lives of the sick or disabled are less valuable is lower in the three countries (USA 38%, BRI 25%, CAN 21%).

Specific Scenarios

A majority of respondents in the three countries support allowing a doctor to end a patient's life under two different scenarios: If a patient is terminally ill and will die in less than six months, and the patient is expected to suffer a great deal of physical and mental anguish during that time (CAN 83%, BRI 82%, USA 62%); and if a patient is in a coma with little or no hope of waking, and the patient had previously specified they wished to have their life terminated if they were ever to find themselves in this condition (CAN 81%, BRI 78%, USA 68%).

No other scenario tested is backed by a majority of respondents in any of the three countries. Britons are more likely to voice support for allowing a patient who has a lifelong, but non-life threatening condition such as being quadriplegic, to end his or her life (46%) than Canadians (35%) and Americans (26%).

Canadians (38%) are more likely than Britons (32%) and Americans (22%) to allow a parent to end the life of his or her child who suffers from a severe form of a condition such as cerebral palsy. Less than one-in-five respondents in the three countries endorse the notion of allowing a patient to die at the same time as their spouse or other loved one.

Legal Issues

Less than a quarter of respondents (USA 22%, BRI 21%, CAN 17%) are satisfied with the regulations that are currently in place in their country to deal with the issue of doctor-assisted suicide. Half of Britons (51%) and Canadians (50%) are dissatisfied with the status quo.

Four-in-five Canadians (81%) and Britons (79%) would like their respective parliaments to debate the topic of doctor-assisted suicide in order to establish national guidelines. In the United States, 54 per cent of respondents would like Congress to discuss this issue.

Analysis

The topic of doctor-assisted suicide has gained prominence in Canada following a British Columbia Supreme Court decision in June. The ruling granted an immediate exemption for one of the plaintiffs, and gave Parliament a year to rewrite the law, which the judge deemed unconstitutional and discriminatory. The federal government has launched an appeal, citing concerns about the effect the ruling could have on sick or elderly people, as well as those with disabilities.

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Also in June, the British Medical Journal published an editorial calling for medical organizations to take a neutral stance on doctor-assisted suicide, so that a decision on its legality “rests with society and its representatives in Parliament.”

Throughout the survey, large majorities of Canadians and Britons support doctor assisted suicide in three cases: if it is requested by a competent, fully-informed, terminally ill patient; if a patient with a terminal illness is expected to suffer a great deal of physical and mental anguish; and if a patient has specifically stated that he or she does not want to be kept in a coma if there is little or no hope of waking.

It is important to note that ending the life of a child with a severe condition—an issue that has clouded the debate on euthanasia in Canada since the Robert Latimer case—is not supported by a majority of respondents in any of the three countries.

In the United States, where doctor-assisted suicide is only allowed in Montana, Oregon and Washington, views on the topic are more nuanced. The proportion of Americans who support doctor-assisted suicide on specific circumstances is lower than in Canada and Britain, and core opposition to the idea is three times higher in the U.S.

Full Methodology Details:

Angus Reid Public Opinion conducted an online survey among:

- 1,003 American adults who are Springboard America panelists, from June 20 to June 21, 2012.
- 2,019 British adults who are Springboard UK panelists, from June 29 to June 30, 2012.
- 1,003 Canadian adults who are Angus Reid Forum panelists, from July 4 to July 5, 2012.

The margin of error—which measures sampling variability—is +/-2.2% for Great Britain and +/-3.1% for the United States and Canada. The results have been statistically weighted according to the most current education, age, gender and region Census data to ensure a sample representative of the entire adult population of each country.

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About Angus Reid Public Opinion

[Angus Reid Public Opinion](#) is a public affairs practice headed by Dr. Angus Reid: an industry visionary who has spent more than four decades asking questions to figure out what people feel, how they think and who they will vote for. A team of talented and experienced practitioners with a unique and profound understanding of global issues conduct high quality research throughout the world on a daily basis for corporations, governments, academic researchers, and non-profit organizations.

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**For more information, please contact
our spokesperson listed in the footnote.**

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Doctor-Assisted Suicide

Next, we'd like to ask you some questions about doctor-assisted suicide. Generally speaking, do you support or oppose allowing a doctor to—at the request of a competent, fully-informed, terminally ill patient—assist the patient in ending his or her life?

	CANADA 	UNITED STATES 	BRITAIN 
Support	80%	56%	77%
Oppose	15%	30%	13%
Not sure	5%	14%	10%

Doctor-Assisted Suicide

What is your personal feeling about doctor-assisted suicide?




	CANADA 	UNITED STATES 	BRITAIN 
Doctor-assisted suicide should never be allowed, regardless of who requests it	10%	29%	9%
Doctor-assisted suicide should be allowed, but only under specific circumstances	75%	50%	76%
Doctor-assisted suicide should always be allowed, regardless of who requests it	9%	7%	6%
Not sure	5%	13%	9%

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Doctor-Assisted Suicide

There are many arguments for and against legalizing doctor-assisted suicide. Do you agree or disagree with each one of the following arguments? – **“Agree” listed**




	CANADA 	UNITED STATES 	BRITAIN 
Legalizing doctor-assisted suicide would give people who are suffering an opportunity to ease their pain	86%	69%	84%
Legalizing doctor-assisted suicide would establish clearer guidelines for doctors to deal with end-of-life decisions	79%	58%	77%
Legalizing doctor-assisted suicide would leave vulnerable people without sufficient legal protection	30%	46%	37%
Legalizing doctor-assisted suicide would send the message that the lives of the sick or disabled are less valuable	21%	38%	25%

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Doctor-Assisted Suicide

Below are some specific scenarios under which a patient might ask for a doctor's help in ending his or her life. For each, please indicate whether you would support or oppose allowing the doctor to end the patient's life? – **"Support" listed**




	CANADA 	UNITED STATES 	BRITAIN 
A patient is terminally ill and will die in less than six months. The patient is expected to suffer a great deal of physical and mental anguish during that time.	83%	62%	82%
A patient is in a coma with little or no hope of waking. The patient had previously specified they wished to have their life terminated if they were ever to find themselves in this condition.	81%	68%	78%
A parent wishes to end the life of his or her child who suffers from a severe form of a condition such as cerebral palsy.	38%	22%	32%
A patient has a lifelong, but non-life threatening condition such as being quadriplegic, and wishes to end his or her life.	35%	26%	46%
A patient wishes to die at the same time as their spouse or other loved one.	12%	18%	15%

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Doctor-Assisted Suicide

From what you have seen, read or heard, are you satisfied or dissatisfied with the regulations that are currently in place in [COUNTRY] to deal with the issue of doctor-assisted suicide?

	CANADA 	UNITED STATES 	BRITAIN 
Very satisfied	3%	8%	4%
Moderately satisfied	14%	14%	17%
Moderately dissatisfied	26%	23%	32%
Very dissatisfied	24%	18%	19%
Not sure	33%	37%	27%

Doctor-Assisted Suicide

Do you support or oppose [YOUR LEGISLATURE] debating the topic of doctor-assisted suicide in order to establish national guidelines?

	CANADA 	UNITED STATES 	BRITAIN 
Support	81%	54%	79%
Oppose	12%	27%	9%
Not sure	7%	20%	12%

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