



## **Should euthanasia be legalised in New Zealand?**

### **The issue:**

Drawn from the ballot in June for parliamentary debate, David Seymour's "End of Life Choice" has reignited interest in the topic in the media and across the nation. The bill proposes that those who have a terminal illness, as determined by medical professionals, and are in a state of suffering will be able to gain access to legally assisted dying without consequences for their doctors or medical staff.

The topic has recently been aired as part of the political campaign in the lead up to the General Election at the end of September.

In order to gauge public opinion and support for the legalisation of euthanasia, Research New Zealand conducted a poll between 17 May and 10 June 2017 with a nationally representative sample of adult New Zealanders. The same poll was previously conducted in October 2016 and in June/July 2015.

### **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 about 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 three-quarters (72 percent) of respondents in the May 2017 poll **agreed** that **doctors** should be allowed by law to help a terminally ill person end their life, if they requested this (Table 1). Nineteen percent did not agree, while 6 percent were undecided.
- ◆ Although this appears to have increased since 2016, the difference is not statistically significant.

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	May 2017
Unweighted base =	500	501	500
	%	%	%
Yes	67	65	72
No	24	22	19
Don't know	9	13	6
Don't care	0	0	3
Total	100	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 47 percent of respondents agreeing with this and 43 percent disagreeing. A further 6 percent stated they were unsure.
- ◆ These results are also comparable to previous measures.

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

*Q2. Still thinking about 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	May 2017
Unweighted base =	500	501	500
	%	%	%
Yes	44	43	47
No	48	46	43
Don't know	8	11	6
Don't care	0	0	3
Total	100	100	100

Total may not sum to 100% due to rounding.



### **Demographic differences:**

We have analysed the May 2017 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** is in relation to ethnicity.
  - ◆ Respondents who identified as New Zealand European were significantly **more likely** than those who identified as ‘other ethnicities’<sup>1</sup> to agree that doctors should be allowed, by law, to help a terminally ill person end their life, if that person requested it (75 percent, compared with 58 percent).
- ◆ There are no significant demographic differences in opinion 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.

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<sup>1</sup> ‘Other’ ethnicities denotes an ethnicity other than New Zealand European, Māori, or Pacific.



**Comment:**

“We now have three measures, each approximately one year apart, with more or less the same results. With about three times as many people in support as not, significantly more New Zealanders are in favour of assisted euthanasia where a doctor is involved. In comparison, 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 500 people aged 18 years and over was conducted by telephone between 17 May and 10 June 2017. The maximum margin of error is +/- 5.6 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 poll was not taken on behalf of any organization, but as part of Research New Zealand's monthly survey of New Zealanders' opinions about topical issues.*

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## TABULATIONS

### Results by demographic sub-groups

Table 3: Agreement that it should be legal for doctors to assist with euthanasia, 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?*

Base =	May 2017	Male	Female
	500	242	258
	%	%	%
Yes	72	74	70
No	19	17	20
Don't know	6	6	6
Don't care	3	4	3
Total	100	100	100

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

Table 4: Agreement that it should be legal for doctors to assist with euthanasia, 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?*

Base =	May 2017	18-34 years	35-54 years	55 years and over
	500	30	137	333
	%	%	%	%
Yes	72	67	75	70
No	19	23	16	20
Don't know	6	4	6	6
Don't care	3	7	2	3
Total	100	100	100	100

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

Table 5: Agreement that it should be legal for doctors to assist with euthanasia, 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?*

Base =	May 2017	Under \$40,000	\$40,000-\$80,000	\$80,000+	Don't know/Refused
	500	155	111	164	70
	%	%	%	%	%
Yes	72	74	69	73	66
No	19	16	21	20	18
Don't know	6	4	7	5	12
Don't care	3	6	3	2	4
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 that it should be legal for doctors to assist with euthanasia, 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?*

	May 2017	None/No qualifications	Secondary school qualification	Polytechnic or trade qualification	Bachelor's degree or higher
Base =	500	68	134	123	170
	%	%	%	%	%
Yes	72	67	68	80	71
No	19	13	21	14	22
Don't know	6	11	7	4	5
Don't care	3	8	4	2	3
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 that it should be legal for doctors to assist with euthanasia, 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?*

	May 2017	NZ European	Māori/Pacific	Other
Base =	500	399	52	73
	%	%	%	%
Yes	72	75	69	58
No	19	18	27	21
Don't know	6	4	1	16
Don't care	3	3	3	5
Total	100	100	100	100

The base numbers shown are unweighted counts.  
Total may not sum to 100% due to multiple response. Some respondents identify with more than one ethnicity.

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

	May 2017	Male	Female
Base =	500	242	258
	%	%	%
Yes	47	51	44
No	43	40	46
Don't know	6	6	7
Don't care	3	3	3
Total	100	100	100

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



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

	May 2017	18-34 years	35-54 years	55 years and over
Base =	500	30	137	333
	%	%	%	%
Yes	47	50	51	41
No	43	40	40	49
Don't know	6	7	6	7
Don't care	3	3	3	3
Total	100	100	100	100

The base numbers shown are unweighted counts.

Total may not sum to 100% due to rounding.

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

	May 2017	Under \$40,000	\$40,000-\$80,000	\$80,000+	Don't know/Refused
Base =	500	155	111	164	70
	%	%	%	%	%
Yes	47	48	47	45	54
No	43	42	45	48	30
Don't know	6	5	7	6	10
Don't care	3	5	1	2	7
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 that it should be legal for other people like close relatives to assist with euthanasia, 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?*

	May 2017	None/No qualifications	Secondary school qualification	Polytechnic or trade qualification	Bachelor's degree or higher
Base =	500	68	134	123	170
	%	%	%	%	%
Yes	47	51	49	48	44
No	43	38	41	45	45
Don't know	6	4	8	4	7
Don't care	3	7	1	2	3
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 that it should be legal for other people like close relatives to assist with euthanasia, 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?*

	May 2017	NZ European	Māori/Pacific	Other
Base =	500	399	52	73
	%	%	%	%
Yes	47	45	57	45
No	43	47	37	36
Don't know	6	5	6	13
Don't care	3	3	0	6
Total	100	100	100	100

The base numbers shown are unweighted counts.

Total may not sum to 100% due to multiple response. Some respondents identify with more than one ethnicity.