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?

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>June/July 2015</th>
<th>October 2016</th>
<th>May 2017</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Unweighted base</td>
<td>%</td>
<td>%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>67</td>
<td>65</td>
<td>72</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>No</td>
<td>24</td>
<td>22</td>
<td>19</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Don’t know</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>13</td>
<td>6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Don’t care</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>100</td>
<td>100</td>
<td>100</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

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?

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>June/July 2015</th>
<th>October 2016</th>
<th>May 2017</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Unweighted base</td>
<td>%</td>
<td>%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>44</td>
<td>43</td>
<td>47</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>No</td>
<td>48</td>
<td>46</td>
<td>43</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Don’t know</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>11</td>
<td>6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Don’t care</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>100</td>
<td>100</td>
<td>100</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

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’¹ 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.

¹ ‘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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Research New Zealand is an independent, New Zealand-owned research organisation undertaking social and business research.

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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?**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Base = 500</th>
<th>Male 242</th>
<th>Female 258</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Yes</strong></td>
<td>72%</td>
<td>74%</td>
<td>70%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>No</strong></td>
<td>19%</td>
<td>17%</td>
<td>20%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Don't know</strong></td>
<td>6%</td>
<td>6%</td>
<td>6%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Don't care</strong></td>
<td>3%</td>
<td>4%</td>
<td>3%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Total</strong></td>
<td>100%</td>
<td>100%</td>
<td>100%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

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?**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Base = 500</th>
<th>18-34 years</th>
<th>35-54 years</th>
<th>55 years and over</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Yes</strong></td>
<td>72%</td>
<td>67%</td>
<td>75%</td>
<td>70%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>No</strong></td>
<td>19%</td>
<td>23%</td>
<td>16%</td>
<td>20%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Don't know</strong></td>
<td>6%</td>
<td>4%</td>
<td>6%</td>
<td>6%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Don't care</strong></td>
<td>3%</td>
<td>7%</td>
<td>2%</td>
<td>3%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Total</strong></td>
<td>100%</td>
<td>100%</td>
<td>100%</td>
<td>100%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

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?**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Base = 500</th>
<th>Under $40,000</th>
<th>$40,000-$80,000</th>
<th>$80,000+</th>
<th>Don’t know/Refused</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Yes</strong></td>
<td>72%</td>
<td>74%</td>
<td>69%</td>
<td>73%</td>
<td>66%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>No</strong></td>
<td>19%</td>
<td>16%</td>
<td>21%</td>
<td>20%</td>
<td>18%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Don’t know</strong></td>
<td>6%</td>
<td>4%</td>
<td>7%</td>
<td>5%</td>
<td>12%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Don’t care</strong></td>
<td>3%</td>
<td>6%</td>
<td>3%</td>
<td>2%</td>
<td>4%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Total</strong></td>
<td>100%</td>
<td>100%</td>
<td>100%</td>
<td>100%</td>
<td>100%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

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?

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Base = May 2017</th>
<th>None/No qualifications</th>
<th>Secondary school qualification</th>
<th>Polytechnic or trade qualification</th>
<th>Bachelor's degree or higher</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>%</td>
<td>%</td>
<td>%</td>
<td>%</td>
<td>%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>72</td>
<td>67</td>
<td>68</td>
<td>80</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>No</td>
<td>19</td>
<td>13</td>
<td>21</td>
<td>14</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Don't know</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>11</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Don't care</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>100</td>
<td>100</td>
<td>100</td>
<td>100</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

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?

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Base = May 2017</th>
<th>NZ European</th>
<th>Māori/Pacific</th>
<th>Other</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>%</td>
<td>%</td>
<td>%</td>
<td>%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>72</td>
<td>75</td>
<td>69</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>No</td>
<td>19</td>
<td>18</td>
<td>27</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Don't know</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Don't care</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>100</td>
<td>100</td>
<td>100</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

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?

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Base = May 2017</th>
<th>Male</th>
<th>Female</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>%</td>
<td>%</td>
<td>%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>47</td>
<td>51</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>No</td>
<td>43</td>
<td>40</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Don't know</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Don't care</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>100</td>
<td>100</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

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?

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Base =</th>
<th>May 2017</th>
<th>18-34 years</th>
<th>35-54 years</th>
<th>55 years and over</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>500</td>
<td>30</td>
<td>137</td>
<td>333</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>%</td>
<td>%</td>
<td>%</td>
<td>%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>47</td>
<td>50</td>
<td>51</td>
<td>41</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>No</td>
<td>43</td>
<td>40</td>
<td>40</td>
<td>49</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Don’t know</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Don’t care</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>100</td>
<td>100</td>
<td>100</td>
<td>100</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

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?

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Base =</th>
<th>May 2017</th>
<th>Under $40,000</th>
<th>$40,000 - $80,000</th>
<th>$80,000+</th>
<th>Don’t know/Refused</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>500</td>
<td>155</td>
<td>111</td>
<td>164</td>
<td>70</td>
</tr>
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<td></td>
<td>%</td>
<td>%</td>
<td>%</td>
<td>%</td>
<td>%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>47</td>
<td>48</td>
<td>47</td>
<td>45</td>
<td>54</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>No</td>
<td>43</td>
<td>42</td>
<td>45</td>
<td>48</td>
<td>30</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Don’t know</td>
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<td>7</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>10</td>
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<td>1</td>
<td>2</td>
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<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>100</td>
<td>100</td>
<td>100</td>
<td>100</td>
<td>100</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

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?

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Base =</th>
<th>May 2017</th>
<th>None/No qualifications</th>
<th>Secondary school qualification</th>
<th>Polytechnic or trade qualification</th>
<th>Bachelor’s degree or higher</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>500</td>
<td>%</td>
<td>%</td>
<td>%</td>
<td>%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>47</td>
<td>51</td>
<td>49</td>
<td>48</td>
<td>44</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>No</td>
<td>43</td>
<td>38</td>
<td>41</td>
<td>45</td>
<td>45</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Don’t know</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Don’t care</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>3</td>
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<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>100</td>
<td>100</td>
<td>100</td>
<td>100</td>
<td>100</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

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?

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>May 2017</th>
<th>NZ European</th>
<th>Māori/Pacific</th>
<th>Other</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>47</td>
<td>45</td>
<td>57</td>
<td>45</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>No</td>
<td>43</td>
<td>47</td>
<td>37</td>
<td>36</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Don't know</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>13</td>
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<tr>
<td>Don't care</td>
<td>3</td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>100</td>
<td>100</td>
<td>100</td>
<td>100</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

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.