

End of Life Choice



Newsletter on current debates

Britain and Australia Common perspectives on assisted-dying law reform

In 2012 Newspoll surveyed 2,521 Australians across all states finding 82.5% support for a change to the law to allow choice for voluntary euthanasia under prescribed circumstances. Strikingly similar results have emerged in Britain. **In March 2015**, in the largest poll ever conducted on assisted-dying in Britain, a leading research and strategy consultancy and member of the British Polling Council, Populus, conducted **a random online sample of 5,018 British adults**. This showed that **82% supported the right of terminally ill, mentally competent people to access the legal option of assistance to die through provision of life-ending medication for self-administration**.

Support was slightly higher among female than male respondents (84% - 80%); spanning 77% support amongst those aged between 25-34 years, to 86% for those aged between 45-54 years. More Conservative Party voter responses supported law reform than Labour voters (55% - 52%). **Significantly, the survey found 80% support amongst those identifying as Christian**, compared with the 2013 YouGov survey which had found 62% support from those identifying as Christian. This support is very similar to the 82% Christian support revealed in the 2012 Newspoll in Australia.

Other key findings in the Populus poll were that 86% of people living with a disability supported law reform: up six per cent from the 2013 YouGov survey. Importantly, 44% stated that they would break the current law and help a loved one to die, even though this would attract a maximum prison sentence of 14 years. This strong stance was stated in 45% of conservative informants and 41% of labour informants. Reflecting this high-level conviction and preparedness to break the law, 53% of all respondents claimed that they would think more positively about a politician who

supported assisted-dying, while only 10% would think more negatively (with 37% stating that it would make no difference).

Attitude to MPs who support law reform

Of particular interest in the 2015 British poll was a question which asked respondents to rank 22 words or phrases spanning a negative-positive continuum; nominating in order the terms they felt best described politicians who support assisted-dying.

Populus
RESEARCH | STRATEGY

Populus is one of the UK's leading research & strategy consultancies specialising in political, reputation, stakeholder and customer research.

The continuum overwhelmingly reflected favourable phrases; the most common being 'compassionate' (65%), followed by 'caring' (47%) and 'in-touch' (33%). Conservative voters polled slightly higher than labour voters on all affirming phrases, while those identifying with a Christian religion polled slightly higher on the positive terms 'compassionate', 'caring' and 'in touch'.

Overall negative responses were ascribed at a very low level; for instance 'irresponsible' (6%) and 'lacking compassion' (3%). In addition, only 21% of men and 20% of women surveyed believed that politicians should vote entirely on the basis of their individual opinions.



Similar expressions of high level conviction were cited in the 2012 Newspoll in Australia. While the Newspoll survey did not pose a question relating to negative or positive words or phrases linked to politicians' views, it did ask participants about how important legalising voluntary euthanasia was for them as a policy issue. It showed that informants ranked voluntary euthanasia third out of eight as a 'hot button' policy issue; just behind the National Disability Insurance Scheme and dealing with asylum seekers.

Australians' personal convictions were also expressed in the findings that ***assisted-dying law reform is held more deeply as an issue by supporters than opponents of law reform to the extent that this conviction would translate into voting behaviour***. Twenty nine per cent of informants stated that they would change their vote on the issue. Overall, 6% of voters stated they would change their vote if their usual party or candidate *supported* law reform, while 23% would change their vote if their party or candidate *opposed* reform. ***The 2012 Newspoll found that respondents across all age groups, religious and political affiliations were strongly in favour of law reform; similar to the 2015 British poll.***



Evidence based approaches to building a better Australia.

Although public opinion polls cannot be the only basis for law reform on a policy issue, there is no doubt about the high-level support for voluntary euthanasia law reform across both jurisdictions. Polls provide both important statistical and qualitative information not easily available through other avenues. The clear-cut views of the British public on the attributes they would ascribe to their politicians, and their preparedness to face prison rather than force loved ones to suffer; together with the knowledge that Australians are at least prepared to change votes, act as powerful litmus tests on the need for political action.

References

- 2015 Populus Poll results: <http://www.populus.co.uk/Poll/Dignity-in-Dying/>
<http://www.populus.co.uk/wp-content/uploads/Dignity-in-Dying-Poll-March-2015-WEBSITE-DATATABLES.pdf>
- YouGov on religious statistics (2013): http://cdn.yougov.com/cumulus_uploads/document/qxfmkooe6/YG-Archive-Dignity-in-Dying-results-240413-assisted-dying-full-religion.pdf
- YouGov disability perspective statistics: (2013) <http://www.dadid.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/2013/12/DADiD-poll-2013.pdf>
- Australian Newspoll executive summary: <http://www.yourlastright.com/sites/default/files/POLL%20WHITE%20PAPER%202012.pdf>

SAVES

South Australian Voluntary Euthanasia Society

saves.asn.au

*Compassion for suffering
The freedom to choose
Add your voice to the call*



SAVES was established in 1983 to campaign for legal, medically assisted choice in end-of-life arrangements. The aim is to relieve suffering by providing choice for people at the end of their life. SAVES works in the community and with Members of Parliament to achieve law reform.

SAVE-YA Syndicated Australian Voluntary Euthanasia Youth Advocates

Facebook: Support SAVE-YA Law Reform



A national youth lobby group which aims to provide a youth voice in support of legalising voluntary euthanasia in all States and Territories. Members between ages 18 and 35 are encouraged to join, make contact with their local MP and inform them of their support for voluntary euthanasia law reform.

Christians Supporting Choice For Voluntary Euthanasia

christiansforve.org.au

We are Christians who believe that, as a demonstration of love and compassion, those with a terminal or hopeless illness should have the option of a pain-free, peaceful and dignified death with legal voluntary euthanasia. The overwhelming majority of Australian Christians support choice for voluntary euthanasia.



Lawyers for Death with Dignity

saves.asn.au/lawyers

Lawyers for Death with Dignity acknowledges the need for people with profound suffering to have the legal choice for a medically assisted and dignified death. The current law says suicide is not illegal, but assisting suicide is. People in a terminal state may have profound, unbearable suffering and be in the undignified position of being unable to end their life without assistance. Advances in medicine have improved life expectancy, but South Australian law has not changed to reflect the often forgotten deterioration of quality of life that a longer life expectancy may bring.



Doctors for Voluntary Euthanasia Choice

drs4vechoice.org



We are a national organisation of Australian medical practitioners, both current and retired, who are committed to having a legal choice of providing information and assistance to rational adults, who, for reasons of no realistic chance of cure or relief from intolerable symptoms, would like to gently end their lives. Assistance may be by doctor provision of medication for the patient to consume, or by doctor-administration.

South Australian Nurses Supporting Choices in Dying

Facebook: SA Nurses Supporting Choices in Dying

We are a group of passionate nurses who believe in our patient's right to choose the end of life care that they wish. The group provides a forum for the nursing voice and perspective on the legalisation of voluntary euthanasia and other patient choices in end of life care in South Australia.



BREAKING NEWS BREAKING NEWS BREAKING NEWS

Disability group supporting VE law reform launched in Adelaide

"People with disability have a voice in the VE reform debate," said Phillip Beddall, in launching MY BODY MY Choice - VE.

"MBMC represents the interests of people with disabilities who wish to exercise choice in all aspects of their life, including choice at the end of life. **Choice and control is a fundamental human right for everyone.**

"We advocate for the rights of adults with terminal illnesses to have a full range of choices, including aggressive pain treatment, hospice care, and physician-assisted dying or voluntary euthanasia. Death, like birth, is part of life, neither to be feared nor denied. We believe end-of-life choices are a private matter, to be decided only by the person who is facing their death.

"People with disabilities know all too well how it feels to lose personal autonomy—this is what the fight for self-determination, independent living and disability rights is about.

"We believe that people with disabilities, who have struggled to control their own lives and bodies, must be allowed to maintain this control and autonomy throughout their life, and especially at its end."