

Roy Morgan Research Survey into Voluntary Euthanasia

**Conducted between June 12 and June 27, 2002
(shortly after Nancy Crick's death)**

1,232 people were surveyed in Victoria (463), New South Wales (442), and South Australia (327), to provide a sample size with a high level of validity.

Summary of Findings

The vast majority of those interviewed supported changes to the existing laws

•Almost three quarters of respondents (73%) in the three States thought that doctors should be allowed to give a lethal dose to hopelessly ill patients who were without hope of recovery. 76% of Victorians agreed with this.

•Seventy percent (70%) of those surveyed in the three States thought that the law should be changed to allow a hopelessly ill patient to seek assistance from a doctor to commit suicide. 71% of Victorians agreed with this.

•Seventy-eight percent (78%) of those interviewed in the three States thought the law should be changed so that it is no longer an offence to merely be present at a suicide. 77% of Victorians agreed with this.

Summary of Findings (Cont'd)

•Less than a quarter of those interviewed (23%) in the three States considered palliative care to be sufficient for terminally ill patients. Only 22% of Victorians considered palliative care to be sufficient.

•Twenty percent (20%) of respondents over 35 in the three States said they had personally experienced a close relative or friend being hopelessly ill and wanting voluntary euthanasia. In Victoria the figure was 22% or nearly 1 in 4.

Question 1

“Thinking now about voluntary euthanasia. If a hopelessly ill patient, experiencing unrelievable suffering, with absolutely no chance of recovering asks for a lethal dose, should a doctor be allowed to give a lethal dose or not?”

	3 STATES	VICTORIA	
	Total (1,232) %	Melbourne (333) %	Country (130) %
Yes, Doctor should be allowed to give lethal dose	73	77	76
No, Doctor should not be allowed to give a lethal dose	22	19	19
Can't say if Doctor should be allowed to give a lethal dose	5	4	5

Previous Results to this Question

“Thinking now about voluntary euthanasia. If a hopelessly ill patient, experiencing unrelievable suffering, with absolutely no chance of recovering asks for a lethal dose, should a doctor be allowed to give a lethal dose or not?”

DATE	YES %	NO %	LOCATION
June, 2002	76	19	Victoria
February, 1997	79.9	15.5	Menzies
May, 1996	74	18	Australia
June, 1995	78	14	Australia
July, 1990	77	17	Australia
November, 1978	67	22	Australia
October, 1962	47	39	Australia

Question 2

“It is not against the law to commit suicide, however it is an offence to assist a suicide. In your opinion, should the law be changed to allow a hopelessly ill person experiencing unrelievable suffering to obtain assistance from a doctor to commit suicide, or not?”

	3 STATES	VICTORIA	
	Total (1,232) %	Melbourne (333) %	Country (130) %
Yes, Law should be changed	70	70	74
No, Law should not be changed	26	26	21
Can't say	4	4	5

Influences on Responses (Victoria)

“It is not against the law to commit suicide, however it is an offence to assist a suicide. In your opinion, should the law be changed to allow a hopelessly ill person experiencing unrelievable suffering to obtain assistance from a doctor to commit suicide, or not?”

Religion

Religion	Yes, To Lethal Injection %	Yes, To Assisted Suicide %
Christians	71	66
Catholics	72	61
No Religion	87	82

Voting Intention

Political Party	Yes, To Lethal Injection %	Yes, To Assisted Suicide %
Liberal	71	69
National	79	71
ALP	80	74

Question 3

“When a person who is hopelessly ill commits suicide, because of unrelievable suffering, anyone who is present may be found guilty of assisting a suicide even if they do nothing to help. In your opinion, should the law be changed so that it is no longer an offence to be present at a suicide?”

	3 STATES	VICTORIA	
	Total (1,232) %	Melbourne (333) %	Country (130) %
Yes, Law should be changed	78	76	80
No, Law should not be changed	17	19	12
Can't say	5	5	8

Influence On Responses (Victoria)

“When a person who is hopelessly ill commits suicide, because of unrelievable suffering, anyone who is present may be found guilty of assisting a suicide even if they do nothing to help. In your opinion, should the law be changed so that it is no longer an offence to be present at a suicide?”

Age (Years)	Yes, Law Should be Changed %	No, Law Should not be Changed %
14 – 17	67	27
18 – 24	70	25
25 – 34	76	17
35 – 49	78	17
50 – 64	82	12
65+	80	15

Question 4

“Palliative care is the care provided to terminally ill patients to keep them as comfortable and pain-free as possible. Do you think that palliative care is sufficient or do you think terminally ill patients should also have the option to request a lethal dose at a time of their choosing?”

	3 STATES	VICTORIA	
	Total (1,232) %	Melbourne (333) %	Country (130) %
Think palliative care is sufficient	23	23	18
Think terminally ill patients should have option to request lethal dose	68	69	71
Can't say	9	8	11

Question 5

“Have you, yourself, had a personal experience where a close relative or friend was hopelessly ill and wanted voluntary euthanasia?”

	3 STATES	VICTORIA	
	Total (1,232) %	Melbourne (333) %	Country (130) %
Yes, Had personal experience	17	17	21
No, Have not had personal experience	82	81	79
Can't say	1	2	-

Influence On Responses (Victoria)

“Have you, yourself, had a personal experience where a close relative or friend was hopelessly ill and wanted voluntary euthanasia?”

Age (Years)	Yes, Had personal experience %	No, Have not had personal experience %
14 – 17	9	91
18 – 24	11	89
25 – 34	15	82
35 – 49	23	76
50 – 64	23	76
65+	17	81

The YES response for the over 35s rises to 22% or nearly 1 in 4. These are the respondents most likely to have had such an experience.

Conclusions

- Support for legalized voluntary euthanasia remains essentially unchanged at a very high level throughout the community, regardless of income and religion.
- Support for physician assisted suicide (a previously untested question) is also very high.
- Support for immunity from prosecution when someone is present at a rational suicide, but does not assist, is even higher (78%).
- These questions were framed in the context of hopeless illness and unrelievable suffering.
- 72% of Victorian Catholics disagree with their hierarchy by supporting voluntary euthanasia.
- Only 23% of Victorians believe palliative care alone is sufficient for care of the terminally ill, whilst 67% want the option of voluntary euthanasia. Palliative Care Victoria specifically denies the need for voluntary euthanasia, whilst recognising that it cannot relieve all the pain and suffering of terminal illness.

Conclusions (Cont'd)

- There is very little difference in preferences by political voting intention, reinforcing the value of political parties treating the issue in a bi-partisan way.
- 22% of Victorians over 35, or nearly 1 in 4, have had a personal experience of a close family member or friend wanting voluntary euthanasia. This represents a very significant unmet need in the community, which the current law is not addressing. It is extremely likely that more Victorians would express a wish for voluntary euthanasia if it were legal.
- There is consistent support for assisted dying over a range of questions, negating suggestions of bias in the previously single question.

