

139 THE QUESTION OF PUBLIC SUPPORT FOR ASSISTED SUICIDE OR EUTHANASIA IN CANADA

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In 1972, the Canadian Criminal Code was revised so that suicide was no longer a punishable offense, but assisted suicide and euthanasia identified as punishable by law. Developments since then have led to the question of whether or not the public is supportive of legalization. Few public surveys have been conducted in Canada or other countries. The University of Alberta's Population Research Laboratory was asked to add questions to their annual telephone survey. This survey is carefully conducted for results highly (95%) representative of persons aged 18+. In May–July 2010, 1203 Albertans were surveyed as expected. Data were obtained and descriptive-comparative tests completed. Amazingly, 77.3% of all responders said yes to the question: Should dying adults be able to get help from others to end their life early? Specifically: 36.8% said yes, every competent adult should have this right; 40.6% said yes, but it should be allowed only in certain cases or situations, 22.7% said no, and 6.2% gave no answer. Albertans did not differ in their support for hastened death by past experience caring for a dying person, having had a friend/family member pass away, where they lived, gender, marital status, income, ethnicity and voting preferences. Four sub-groups were not as supportive (although 50%+ were still in support): religious people, older adults, those without high school completion, and those without a living will. Albertans are surprisingly open to hastened death, with this information needing to be taken into consideration for future developments in advanced care planning and end-of-life care.