End of life decisions are deeply personal ones. But, their impact resonates. Certain states are bringing the debate front and center by considering legislation to redefine a physician’s role, and, in some circumstances, the role of health care institutions and other health care professionals. How far should doctors, health care organizations, and other health care professionals be *required* by law to go in order to satisfy the wishes of the terminally ill? This survey of Americans attempts to understand the complexity of opinion on the issue.

There is little consensus among Americans on the issue of physician assisted suicide. (It is important to note that like the legislation being considered in many states, at no time in the survey was the issue referred to as physician assisted suicide). Although the issue is important to some Americans, only 22% consider it a top priority for their statewide lawmakers. In contrast, 78% perceive the economy to be a key topic for debate in their state. While 43% of Americans support a doctor having a role in end of life decisions, the majority, 57%, either oppose it or are not sure where to come down on the issue.

Generational differences are present. While a plurality of Americans in the Greatest Generation, 45%, is against allowing a doctor to prescribe a fatal drug dose to a terminally ill patient who wants to end their life, pluralities of their younger counterparts support it.
Executive Summary (continued)

When it comes to restrictions on a physician’s role, many Americans want significant limitations put in place. 61% think, at most, a doctor should be permitted to remove a patient from life support and other medical interventions. Even 27% of people who support physician assisted suicide agree. Of note, more than seven in ten Americans without a position on the issue, 73%, want to significantly curtail a doctor’s role.

On the personal side, would Americans turn to a doctor to end their life if given less than six months to live? Close to three in four residents, 74%, would not. This includes a majority, 51%, who would definitely not choose this option. Interestingly, 87% of Americans who neither support nor oppose the legislation being considered say they would not seek a doctor’s help in ending their own life. Even 45% of residents who support legalization would not choose to do so.

A majority of Americans, 57%, are less likely to trust a doctor who believes he or she has a role to assist a terminally ill patient who wishes to end their life. Here, too, a notable proportion of residents who are in favor of allowing a doctor to prescribe a fatal drug dose, 30%, would not put their faith in a doctor who believes in taking such a role.

When offered specific, potential abuses, many Americans voice concern. They are most worried that patients without better health insurance will be given fewer life-saving options, 67%; that nursing home patients will be at risk, 65%; or that depressed patients will be more inclined to take their lives, 64%.
Majorities are worried that the doctor’s prediction of the course or outcome of the disease is wrong, 59%; the doctor does not accurately determine the patient's state of mind if there is no requirement for a psychiatrist or mental health professional to do an evaluation, 55%; the option may become a cost saving measure for health care decisions, 55%; or patients will be pressured to take their life so as not to become a burden to their friends or families, 54%. These concerns even weigh on many of those who express support for such legislation.

If a law is passed permitting a terminally ill patient to take his or her life, should doctors or organizations with moral or religious objections be exempt from the requirement to prescribe the fatal drug dose? More than three in four Americans, 78%, think they should be allowed to opt out on moral grounds.
END OF LIFE DECISIONS
While most Americans consider the economy to be a top priority for state law makers, only about one in five thinks allowing a doctor to participate in end of life decisions should be a key issue.

Should each of the following issues be a top priority for the governor and your state legislature, important but not a top priority, or should it not be a priority: Improving the economy; making health care more affordable; increasing minimum wage; reducing state taxes and fees; allowing patients with a terminal illness to be prescribed medication to take their own lives?*

*Presents percentage reporting Top Priority

1. This survey of 1,169 adults was conducted February 25th, 2015 through March 1st, 2015 by The Marist Poll sponsored and funded in partnership with The Knights of Columbus. Adults 18 years of age and older residing in the continental United States were interviewed in English on landline or cell phones using live interviewers. Results are statistically significant within ±2.9 percentage points.
Assisted Suicide Lacks Strong Support in the Nation

Do Americans favor such legislation? A plurality, 43%, does, 36% oppose, and a notable 21% are unsure where they stand on the issue.

In some states, legislation is being considered which would allow doctors to prescribe a fatal drug dose to adults who have been told they have less than six months to live so they can take their own life if they want to. Do you strongly support, support, neither support nor oppose, oppose, or strongly oppose such legislation?

- **Strongly support**: 18%
- **Support**: 25%
- **Neither support nor oppose**: 43%
- **Oppose**: 14%
- **Strongly oppose**: 22%

1. 35% of Americans are aware of laws which would allow doctors to help terminally ill patients end their lives. In fact, only 11% have a great deal of information about laws or proposed legislation.

2. 53% of Americans who support the legislation have very little, if any, knowledge about it. 75% of Americans who neither support nor oppose the proposed law and 74% of those who oppose it say the same.

3. A plurality of those in the Greatest generation, 45%, opposes legislation which allows a doctor to have a role in end of life decisions. Pluralities in each of the younger generations support such involvement.
Most Prefer Doctors Not Assist with Suicides

A Doctor’s Role:

- **31%** Only help to manage illness
- **30%** Remove life support
- **17%** Prescribe a fatal drug dose
- **19%** Administer fatal drug dose

61% Want Significant Limits including

- More than 1 and 4 of those who support legislation
- 73% of those who neither support nor oppose
- 95% of Americans who oppose legislation

*Which one of the following statements comes closest to your opinion about the role doctors should play when a patient has a terminal illness and wants to take their own life: One, doctors should be allowed to assist the patient to take their life including being allowed to administer the dose of a fatal drug; Two, doctors should be allowed to prescribe a fatal drug dose so the patient can take their own life; Three, doctors should be allowed to remove life support and other medical interventions for the patient to let nature take its course; Four, doctors should not be allowed to assist the patient to take their own life but should prescribe drugs and care to manage their illness?*

Digging Deeper

1. Millennials, 38%, are more likely than other generations to say a doctor should only be allowed to prescribe palliative care.
2. 76% of those who practice a religion say a doctor should be permitted to, at most, remove a patient from life support. 53% of those who do not practice a faith say a doctor should be allowed to administer, 29%, or prescribe a fatal drug dose, 24%.
Would Americans trust a doctor who believes he or she should participate in end of life decisions? A majority, 57%, would not.

Are you more likely, or less likely to trust a doctor who believes it is their role to prescribe a fatal drug dose to patients who are terminally ill so the patient can take their own life?

- 57% Less Likely
- 33% More Likely
- 7% No Difference

Digging Deeper

1. 61% of those who neither support nor oppose legislation to allow a doctor to prescribe a fatal drug dose would be less likely to trust a doctor who believes it is his or her role to do so. 30% of those who favor legislation agree.

2. While 69% of those who practice a religion would be less likely to put their trust in a doctor who believes they should be permitted to participate in end of life choices, there is little consensus among those who do not practice a faith. 43% would be more likely to trust such a doctor, 44% would be less likely, and 10% say it makes no difference.
Even if it were legal, 74% of Americans say, if faced with a terminal illness, they would *not* ask a doctor to end their life. This includes 51% who think they would *definitely not* make such a request.

### Americans

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Percentage</th>
<th>Action</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>7%</td>
<td>Definitely ask a doctor to help you end your life</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>19%</td>
<td>Probably ask a doctor</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>23%</td>
<td>Probably not ask a doctor</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>51%</td>
<td>Definitely not ask a doctor to end your life</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

### Digging Deeper

1. **Baby Boomers**, 33%, are more likely than other generations to say they would seek a doctor’s help to end their life. More than seven in ten Millennials, 76%, Gen X’ers, 77%, and members of the Greatest generation, 73%, would not.

2. Religiosity matters. 65% of Americans who practice their faith, compared with 35% of those who do not practice a faith, report they would *definitely not* ask a physician to help them end their life if given less than six months to live.

3. 87% of Americans who neither support nor oppose allowing a doctor to play a part in end of life decisions think they would not ask a doctor to help them end their lives. This includes a majority, 56%, who believes they would definitely not select this option. Even 45% of those who support the legislation would not look to end their own life.
CONCERNS ABOUT ABUSE
Patients who are depressed will be more likely to want to take their life. The doctor’s prognosis of the outcome of the disease is wrong. The doctor does not properly assess the patient’s state of mind. It may become cost saving for health care decisions. Patients will be pressured to take their life so as not to become a burden.

Patients without better health insurance will be given fewer life-saving options. The elderly may become at risk in nursing homes.

If it is legal for doctors to prescribe a fatal drug dose to patients with a terminal illness who want to take their own life, do you worry a great deal, a good amount, not very much, or not at all about each of the following?*

*Presents percentage reporting great deal/good amount
When presented with specific, potential abuses of permitting a physician to take part in end of life decisions, majorities of Americans express concern. They are particularly worried that patients without better health insurance or nursing home residents may be at risk or that depressed patients will be more inclined to take their own lives.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Concern</th>
<th>Americans</th>
<th>Millennials</th>
<th>Gen X</th>
<th>Baby Boomers</th>
<th>Greatest</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1. Patients without better health insurance will be given fewer life-saving options</td>
<td>67%</td>
<td>75%</td>
<td>65%</td>
<td>68%</td>
<td>55%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2. The elderly may become at risk in nursing homes or health care facilities</td>
<td>65%</td>
<td>66%</td>
<td>60%</td>
<td>70%</td>
<td>59%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3. Patients who are depressed will be more likely to want to take their life</td>
<td>64%</td>
<td>69%</td>
<td>64%</td>
<td>69%</td>
<td>51%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4. The doctors' prediction of the course or outcome of the disease is wrong</td>
<td>59%</td>
<td>67%</td>
<td>59%</td>
<td>59%</td>
<td>48%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The doctor does not accurately determine the patient's state of mind given there is no requirement for a psychiatrist or mental health professional to do the evaluation if the patient’s doctor believes the patient is of sound mind</td>
<td>55%</td>
<td>60%</td>
<td>54%</td>
<td>56%</td>
<td>46%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5. It may become a cost saving measure for health care decisions</td>
<td>55%</td>
<td>54%</td>
<td>51%</td>
<td>62%</td>
<td>49%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6. Patients will be pressured to take their life so as not to become a burden to their friends or families</td>
<td>54%</td>
<td>63%</td>
<td>53%</td>
<td>56%</td>
<td>39%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*Presents percentage reporting great deal/good amount*
**Concerns About Abuse**

Even notable proportions of Americans who are in favor of the proposed legislation express anxiety about its potential risks. At least a majority of Americans without a stand on the issue are also worrisome.

*If it is legal for doctors to prescribe a fatal drug dose to patients with a terminal illness who want to take their own life, do you worry a great deal, a good amount, not very much, or not at all about each of the following:*  

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Concern</th>
<th>Support</th>
<th>Neither</th>
<th>Oppose</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Patients without better health insurance will be given fewer life-saving options</td>
<td>67%</td>
<td>60%</td>
<td>65%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The elderly may become at risk in nursing homes or health care facilities</td>
<td>65%</td>
<td>53%</td>
<td>62%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Patients who are depressed will be more likely to want to take their life</td>
<td>64%</td>
<td>57%</td>
<td>62%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The doctors' prediction of the course or outcome of the disease is wrong</td>
<td>59%</td>
<td>49%</td>
<td>60%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The doctor does not accurately determine the patient's state of mind given there is no requirement for a psychiatrist or mental health professional to do the evaluation if the patient’s doctor believes the patient is of sound mind</td>
<td>55%</td>
<td>49%</td>
<td>55%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>It may become a cost saving measure for health care decisions</td>
<td>55%</td>
<td>46%</td>
<td>54%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Patients will be pressured to take their life so as not to become a burden to their friends or families</td>
<td>54%</td>
<td>42%</td>
<td>54%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*Presents percentage reporting great deal/good amount*
If there is a law that allows a terminally ill adult to take their own life, should a doctor or health care organization that has a moral or religious objection to prescribing the fatal drug dose be required to prescribe the lethal drug or be allowed to opt out?

Most believe the moral objections of health care providers should be respected, if a law is passed allowing a physician’s involvement in end of life decisions.

- **78%** Allowed to opt out
- **17%** Required to prescribe the lethal drug

### About the Survey

1. This survey of 1,169 adults was conducted February 25th, 2015 through March 1st, 2015 by The Marist Poll sponsored and funded in partnership with The Knights of Columbus. Adults 18 years of age and older residing in the continental United States were interviewed in English on landline or cell phones using live interviewers. Results are statistically significant within ±2.9 percentage points.
**Generations**

- **Gen X’ers**
  - 38% know about legislation that would permit a doctor to have a role in end of life decisions
  - 46% favor legalizing the proposed legislation. 34% oppose it
  - 56% support, at most, removing a patient from life support
  - Many are concerned about the potential abuses. Their leading concern is that those without better health insurance will be given fewer life-saving options, 75%
  - 50% believe the risks of allowing a doctor to have a part in end of life decisions outweigh the benefits
  - 76% would not personally seek a doctor’s help in ending their life

- **Millennials**
  - 30% are aware of legislation to allow a physician to prescribe a fatal drug dose to terminally ill patients
  - 41% support allowing a doctor to have a role in end of life choices. 38% oppose it
  - 62% say a doctor should, at most, be allowed to remove a patient from life support
  - Majorities worry about the potential abuses. Their leading concern is that those without better health insurance will be given fewer life-saving options, 75%
  - 50% believe the risks of allowing a doctor to have a part in end of life decisions outweigh the benefits
  - 76% would not personally seek a doctor’s help in ending their life

- **Baby Boomers**
  - 36% know about the legislation to allow a doctor to be involved in end of life decisions
  - 47% support the legislation. 31% oppose it
  - 58% believe a doctor should be permitted to, at most, remove a patient from life support
  - Majorities worry about the potential pitfalls of giving a physician a role in end of life options. They have the most concern about the impact on nursing home patients, 70%, or depressed patients, 69%. They also fear that those without better health insurance will be given fewer options, 68%
  - 49%, believe the benefits outweigh the risks
  - 66% would not ask a doctor to help them end their lives

- **The Greatest Generation**
  - 37% know about legislation to permit a doctor to prescribe a fatal drug dose to terminally ill patients
  - 45% oppose the legislation. 37% support it
  - 70% report a doctor’s role should not go beyond taking a patient off of life support
  - 59% worry about the implications for nursing home patients. Only 39% are concerned that patients will be pressured to take their life so as not to become a burden
  - 51% worry about the implications for nursing home patients. Only 39% are concerned that patients will be pressured to take their life so as not to become a burden
  - 51% say the risks outweigh the benefits
  - 73%, would not seek a doctor’s help in ending their lives

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**Profile**

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  - 56% support, at most, removing a patient from life support
  - Many are concerned about the potential abuses. 65% are worried that those without better health insurance will be given fewer life-saving options. The possibility that depressed patients, 64%, will be more likely to want to take their life
  - Divide about whether the benefits of permitting a doctor to have a role in end of life options outweigh the risks, 48%. 48% have the opposite view
  - 77% would not ask a doctor to help them end their lives

- **The Greatest Generation**
  - 37% know about legislation to permit a doctor to prescribe a fatal drug dose to terminally ill patients
  - 45% oppose the legislation. 37% support it
  - 70% report a doctor’s role should not go beyond taking a patient off of life support
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  - 51% say the risks outweigh the benefits
  - 73%, would not seek a doctor’s help in ending their lives
STUDY METHODOLOGY
This study was undertaken by The Knights of Columbus and conducted by The Marist Institute for Public Opinion located at Marist College in Poughkeepsie, New York.

This report presents the findings from a random digit dial telephone survey of 2,079 Americans, including both landline and cell phone sampling frames.

Reports for Americans have a margin of error of +/- 2.1 percentage points.

Data were collected in January 2015.

Analysis of sub-groups is included when noteworthy and/or statistically different.

Please note that some totals may not add to 100% due to rounding.
Methodology Statement

• This survey of 2,079 adults was conducted January 7, 2015 through January 13, 2015 by The Marist Poll sponsored and funded in partnership with The Knights of Columbus. Adults 18 years of age and older residing in the continental United States were interviewed in English by telephone using live interviewers.

• Landline telephone numbers were randomly selected based upon a list of telephone exchanges from throughout the nation from ASDE Survey Sampler, Inc. The exchanges were selected to ensure that each region was represented in proportion to its population. Respondents in the household were selected by asking for the youngest male. To increase coverage, this landline sample was supplemented by respondents reached through random dialing of cell phone numbers from Survey Sampling International. The two samples were then combined and balanced to reflect the 2010 Census results for age, gender, income, race, and region. Results are statistically significant within ±2.1 percentage points.

• Some questions on the issue of end of life decisions were asked of half the sample. Survey respondents were randomly selected to complete one of two survey forms. For this report, questions from survey form B are reported. There are 1,323 national adults. Results are statistically significant within ±2.7 percentage points.
The Marist College Institute for Public Opinion (MIPO) is a survey research center at Marist College in Poughkeepsie, New York. The Marist Poll has conducted independent research on public priorities, elections, and a wide variety of social issues. Through the regular public release of surveys, MIPO has built a legacy of independence, reliability, and accuracy. Its results are featured in print and electronic media throughout the world.

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The Knights of Columbus is one of the nation's premiere volunteer and charitable organizations. Last year, Knights worldwide donated more than 70 million hours, and more than $170 million to charitable causes in communities throughout the Americas, as well in Europe and Asia. From helping children in need, to providing wheelchairs for the disabled, to helping stock food banks, to offering top-rated and affordable life insurance to its members, the Knights has been at the service of the community for more than 127 years, and is the world's largest Catholic service organization.

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(845) 575-5050

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