

# **As Kevorkian Released, Just One Quarter (25%) Believe Doctor-Assisted Suicide Should Be Illegal**

*Most (76%) Canadians Support 'Right to Die'*

*Canadians Unchanged in their Opinions of Fourteen Years Ago*

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**Ipsos Reid**

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## **As Dr. Kevorkian Released, Just One Quarter (25%) Believe Doctor-Assisted Suicide Should Be Illegal**

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*Canadians Unchanged in their Opinions of Fourteen Years Ago*

**Toronto, ON** – With the release of Dr. Jack Kevorkian from prison in the United States last week after serving eight years behind bars, a new Ipsos Reid poll conducted exclusively for CanWest News Service and Global Television finds that just one quarter (25%) of Canadians believe that 'doctor-assisted suicide should be prohibited by law'. Seemingly agreeing with Kevorkian, who was convicted for illegally assisting a terminally-ill patient who wanted to die through doctor-assisted suicide, seven in ten (71%) Canadians agree that 'doctors willing to do this should be legally permitted to assist in the death' of a terminally-ill patient.

In general terms, morally speaking, most Canadians (76%) either 'strongly' (49%) or 'somewhat support' (27%) the concept of an individual having the 'right to die', whereby an individual who is terminally ill and wants to die before enduring the full course of the disease has the right to take their own life. Conversely, just two in ten (21%) 'strongly' (13%) or 'somewhat oppose' (8%) the concept of people having the 'right to die'.

Remarkably, Canadians are unchanged in their opinions of ten years ago. In 1993, speaking in the context of media attention paid to a court appeal in British Columbia by Sue Rodriguez to end her life through doctor-assisted suicide, an equal proportion (76%) of Canadians supported the 'right to die', and a comparable proportion (70%) agreed, in 1993, that doctors

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willing to perform the procedure should be 'permitted to assist in the death of a terminally-ill patient'. Conversely, one quarter (24%) of Canadians in 1993 believed that doctor assisted suicide should be illegal, while 17% opposed the concept of 'right to die'.

*These are the findings of an Ipsos Reid poll conducted exclusively for CanWest Global from June 5 to June 7, 2007. For the survey, a representative randomly selected sample of 1005 adults was interviewed by telephone. With a sample of this size, the results are considered accurate to within  $\pm 3.1$  percentage points, 19 times out of 20, of what they would have been had the entire adult population been polled. The margin of error will be larger within regions and for other sub-groupings of the survey population. These data were weighted to ensure that the sample's regional and age/sex composition reflects that of the actual Canadian population according to Census data.*

## ***Just One Quarter (25%) Believe Doctor-Assisted Suicide Should be Illegal...***

With the recent release of Dr. Jack Kevorkian in the news, the issue of whether or not doctors should be permitted to assist terminally-ill patients in taking their own lives has resurfaced. In this regard, just one quarter (25%) of Canadians believe that 'doctor-assisted suicide should be prohibited by law'. On the other hand, seven in ten (71%) appear to support the actions of Kevorkian, maintaining that 'doctors willing to do this should be legally permitted to assist in the death' of a terminally-ill patient.

- Canadians across Canada, however, are not uniform in their opinions on this matter. Nearly all (84%) residents in Quebec believe that doctors should be legally permitted to perform this procedure, while just six in ten (61%) in Alberta feel the same way.

- Conversely, over one third (35%) of those in Saskatchewan and Manitoba believe that doctor-assisted suicide should be illegal, while only 14% of those in Quebec are in agreement.
- Residents of Saskatchewan (64%), Ontario (65%) and Atlantic Canada (66%) are similarly more reserved in this matter than those in the rest of Canada.
- Those living in rural settings are more likely (31%) than those in urban surroundings (24%) to say that 'doctor-assisted suicide should be prohibited by law'.

### ***Most (76%) Support 'Right to Die'...***

Speaking in terms of morality, most Canadians (76%) either 'strongly' (49%) or 'somewhat support' (27%) the concept of an individual having the 'right to die'. Conversely, just two in ten (21%) 'strongly' (13%) or 'somewhat oppose' (8%) the concept of people having the 'right to die'.

- Those with a university degree are more likely to support (79%) an individual's 'right to die', with half (51%) indicating that they 'strongly support' this concept, and three in ten (28%) saying that they 'somewhat support' this concept. This is in comparison to 63% of those without a high school diploma who either 'strongly' (38%) or 'somewhat' (25%) support the concept.
- Quebecers are more likely (87%) to 'strongly' (52%) or 'somewhat support' (35%) the 'right to die', while Albertans are least likely (66%) of residents in all other regions in Canada to 'strongly' (43%) or 'somewhat' (23%) support this concept.

- Men (78%) are slightly more likely than women (74%) to support the concept of people having the 'right to die'.

### *Canadians Unchanged in their Opinions of Fourteen Years Ago...*

In 1993, Canadians were asked these same questions; however, the context in which they were asked was slightly different. In 1993, media coverage of Sue Rodriguez's court appeal in British Columbia to obtain the right to doctor-assisted suicide was extensive. In the greater context of this event, three quarters (76%) of Canadians supported the 'right to die', and a seven in ten (70%) agreed that doctors willing to perform the procedure should be 'permitted to assist in the death of a terminally-ill patient'. Conversely, one quarter (24%) of Canadians in 1993 believed that doctor assisted suicide should be illegal, while 17% opposed the concept of the 'right to die'. This is an interesting comparison. Despite the fact that the Sue Rodriguez case in B.C. was about an individual seeking doctor-assisted suicide, and the Kevorkian case in the United States was about a doctor performing that particular procedure himself, Canadians are unchanged in their views of fourteen years ago. Statistically speaking, Canadians feel the same today as they did in 1993.

**Table 1: Support of the Concept of 'Right to Die'**

	2007	1993
Support	76%	76%
Oppose	21%	17%
DK/Refused	3%	7%

Q: One issue that's received attention lately concerns the 'right to die', that is, whether a person who is terminally -ill and wants to die before enduring the full course of the disease, should have the right to take their own life. As a moral question, do you personally support or oppose the concept of people having the 'right to die'?



**Table 2: Support of ‘Doctor-Assisted Suicide’**

	2007	1993
Doctors should be legally permitted to assist in the death of terminally-ill patient	71%	70%
Doctor-assisted suicide should be prohibited by law	25%	24%
DK/Refused	3%	7%

Q: Another issue which has been in the news lately is “doctor-assisted suicide”, which refers to a medical doctor assisting a terminally ill patient in ending their life if they want to. Do you think doctors who are willing to do this should be legally permitted to assist the death of a terminally ill patient who wants to die, or should “doctor-assisted suicide” be prohibited by law?

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