

California Death with Dignity (assisted death) law takes effect



[On June 9, 2016](#), California joined the ranks of the four other

states that have made assisted death legal. The California End of Life Option Act, which Governor Jerry Brown signed into law in October 2015, took effect on that day.

Death with Dignity

Brittany Maynard brought the [“Death with Dignity”](#) movement to the nation’s attention; diagnosed with terminal brain cancer, she fought long and hard advocating for the passage of right-to-die bills nationwide. At 29, she moved to Oregon, where an assisted death law was already in place, to legally end her life on her own terms.

Maynard worked with the nonprofit Compassion & Choices (C&C), an organization dedicated to “expanding choice at the end of life.” C&C continued their advocacy campaign after her death, leading the statewide grassroots fight for passage of the bill.

The law applies only to patients with a prognosis of six months or less to live. These patients must submit two oral requests for lethal medication, at least 15 days apart; then, two physicians must approve the request. Notably, patients will administer the medication themselves – physicians are not allowed to do so.

The numbers

Some opponents have expressed concern that terminally ill patients will be pressured to end their lives, but the data from states where assisted death has been legal for years suggests otherwise. [According to the Los Angeles Times](#), only 991 people in Oregon died from lethal medication between the years of 1998 and 2015. A study published in the *New England Journal of Medicine* found that five out of every six patients who request lethal medication are denied, which further undermines the idea that physicians push patients into assisted death.

The vast majority (92%) of patients seeking aid in dying reported loss of autonomy as one of their reasons for choosing to end their own lives. 90% cited the loss of enjoyable activities as a reason, while 79% feared loss of dignity.

Only a handful of states –Washington, Oregon, Montana, Vermont, and now California – have passed aid in dying legislation, but grassroots support is cropping up all over the nation. With Compassion & Choices continuing its outreach efforts and citizens all around the nation demanding action in other states, we may well witness the passage of many more Death with Dignity laws in the future.

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