

# Talking About Assisted Dying

*Conversation starter kit*



**This month, you will take part in an historic vote to decide if dying Kiwis will have a choice to die on their own terms.**

To make sure more than 50% of New Zealanders vote YES for End of Life Choice, we need to speak to everyone we know about the vote. Research shows conversations are what really changes hearts and minds.

People you know – family, whānau, friends, colleagues, communities, someone at your local sports club or at church – will be far more convinced by you than any advert or billboard.

That's why right now, end of life choice supporters are starting thousands of conversations all across New Zealand. Some folks we talk to will already be on board. Others might not have thought about it yet, or haven't made up their minds.

Polls show that only a small group of Kiwis strongly oppose this new law coming into force. More than 60% of us support end of life choice for terminally ill New Zealanders.

But lots of people who support the new law coming into force still have questions. The evidence from overseas tells us that by listening, sharing our experiences and approaching that as a conversation rather than an angry debate, we have a much better chance of bringing people along with us. And with that, make sure they are committed to voting YES next week.

There's no doubt that these very personal conversations can sometimes be confronting. But they can also be incredibly respectful, useful and even comforting. Creating an open space, without judgement, for people to ask questions and share concerns means we are campaigning in line with our values – that people should be allowed personal choice, control of their own lives and be shown compassion.

The information below is to help you start conversations – but it's only a guide. For more information, go to:  
**[www.yesforcompassion.org.nz/faqs/](http://www.yesforcompassion.org.nz/faqs/)**

**For more information visit:** [yesforcompassion.org.nz](http://yesforcompassion.org.nz)

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# Talking About Assisted Dying

*What to say*



**This is a law for NZers with terminal illness who are already dying to have a say over how that happens.**

**Palliative care is excellent in NZ, some of the best in the world – but even then, it doesn't work for everybody.**

- **Between 2–5%** of people will suffer unbearably as they die, because even the best care and medications cannot control their suffering.

**Sadly, some terminally ill people even take their own lives to avoid suffering a horrible end.**

- The latest suicide statistics show roughly one terminally ill Kiwi a week. That causes such trauma for the person and their loved one.
- Wouldn't a better death be one that is planned, surrounded by loved ones, with a chance to say goodbye?

**A quarter of people who are eligible and get the medication don't end up taking it – but having the choice gives people enormous peace of mind and reassurance.**

**This is a safe law, with robust safeguards – the safest in the world.**

- It is limited to people with terminal illness in the final six months of their lives and who have mental capacity to make their own decisions.
- Doctors have to take a person through 45 requirements before they're deemed eligible, and it all gets checked by the Ministry of Health too.
- Remember – mental illness, disability and advanced age alone do not make you eligible.

**Laws work safely overseas too. There's no evidence of abuse and countries with laws like ours actually have better funded palliative care services.**

**We've got to trust dying Kiwis to know what's right for them – and we've also got to trust our Doctors to do their jobs.**

- We trust them with life and death decisions every day, and the Act means they have to make more checks for this than any other medical decision.

**150 million people worldwide have this choice – why not here?**

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# Talking About Assisted Dying

*A step by step guide*



## The right time

“Do you have a few minutes?”

*Use your common sense to check if now is a good time to talk*



## Introduce the issue

“Have you thought about the End of Life Choice referendum?”

*Remember - this might be the first time that they have really thought about the issue, so give them time and space to work it through for themselves before you start digging deeper into the discussion.*

## If they support it

“Me too! Why do you support it?”

*This gives them a chance to really think about why this issue is important to them - which means that they are more likely to be clear about why they support this - and for you to share why this issue matters to you too.*

## If they're unsure

“It sounds like you are not 100% on this. What part of you is leaning towards supporting end of life choice? For me, it means that...”

*You can help by moving this from being an ‘issue’ to being about a person they care about. So listen, but also share why this matters to you.*

## If they're against

“It sounds like we might just have to agree to disagree.”

*If they have lots of reasons why they're voting no, they have probably already made up their mind. Don't take this personally.*

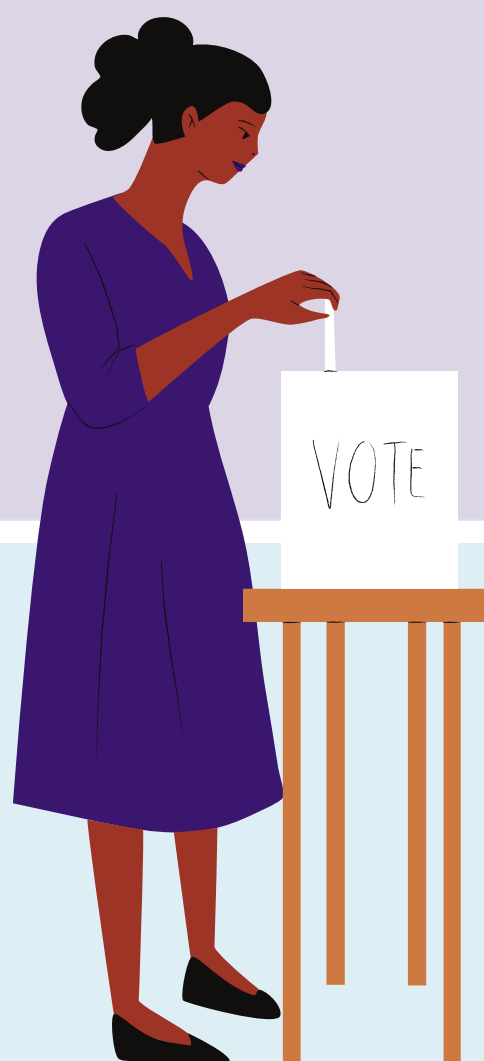
*It can be hard when people you know don't see things in the same way or share your values. But all it means is that they are someone who cannot take that last step with you on this issue.*

*Remember, the **majority** of Kiwis **support** end of life choice for terminally ill people. So right now, it's better for you to focus on finding those people who are mostly supportive but have questions - than trying to convince or change someone's mind.*

## Ask them if they will vote YES

“Can I count on you to vote YES in the End of Life Choice referendum on the 17 October?”

*No matter how strongly someone seems to support the issue, it's always worth asking the question about voting! Remember, this is a voluntary process and every vote will count.*



## If they say they will vote YES

“That's great! I really believe that passing this law is the compassionate thing to do.”

*If they seem keen, ask them if they will speak to their friends and community about the referendum too.*

## Say thank you

“Thanks for talking to me about this today.”

*Always end the conversation well. Our campaign is about compassion, after all.*

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# Talking About Assisted Dying

*Addressing concerns*



## “What about coercion?”

The law has strong safeguards to protect from coercion.

There are 45 requirements a person must meet before they're eligible for this law.

There is no evidence of abuse in countries like Australia and America where they have similar laws.

## “Surely we just need better palliative care?”

Palliative care in NZ is excellent but it doesn't work for everyone. 2-5% of people die with unbearable suffering.

Palliative care and assisted dying complement each other. Overseas, people who access assisted dying are also accessing palliative care – so the two work together. It's not an either/or.

*Ask them: I expect you've experienced some deaths close to you. What were they like? What made them good/difficult?*

## “I'm worried about people with mental illness and/or disabilities.”

Only people with terminal illness are eligible under this law – that means you have less than six months to live and experience both irreversible physical decline and unbearable suffering.

Mental illness or advanced age alone do not make you eligible.

Disability is not a terminal illness.

## “Won't this encourage suicide?”

People with terminal illness don't want to die – they aren't suicidal. But they are dying, and they want choice and control about how that happens.

The most recent suicide statistics show roughly one terminally ill Kiwi a week takes their own life – rather than suffer a horrible death. If people could have assistance to die, there would be fewer suicides.

In other countries there hasn't been any rise in suicide rates.

## “Can't people already do this by refusing treatment?”

The only options open to people at the moment are:

- refusing treatment, which can lead to a long, painful death
- refusing food and water to starve and dehydrate to death
- terminal sedation, meaning you die unconscious and unable to say goodbye.

*Ask them: Have you ever thought about your own death? How would you want it to be? If there was the option to plan it, have music playing and your loved ones around and a chance to say goodbye - would you prefer that?*

## “Isn't there a risk this law will get wider?”

In countries with laws like ours, there's no evidence of this. In Oregon, the law has been the same for more than 20 years since it was first passed!

The countries where the laws widened had wider laws from Day 1. That won't happen in NZ.

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