

Frequently Asked Questions: Colorado End-of-Life Options Act

Colorado voters overwhelmingly passed the Colorado End-of-Life Options Act which authorizes medical aid in dying, a safe and trusted medical practice in which a terminally ill, mentally capable adult with a prognosis of six months or less to live may request from their doctor a prescription for medication that they can choose to self-ingest to bring about a peaceful death. The law went into effect on December 16, 2016.

Who is Eligible for Medical Aid in Dying?

- To be eligible for medical aid in dying under Colorado's law, an individual must be:
 - ◆ An adult
 - ◆ Terminally ill
 - ◆ Given a prognosis of six months or less to live
 - ◆ Mentally capable of making their own health-care decisions.

- An individual must also be:
 - ◆ A resident of Colorado
 - ◆ Acting voluntarily
 - ◆ Making an informed decision which includes being given information about all other end-of-life options
 - ◆ Informed that s/he may choose to obtain the aid-in-dying drug, but not take it

- ◆ Capable of self-administering and ingesting the aid-in-dying drug

Two Colorado physicians must consult with the individual and agree that he or she is eligible to use the Colorado End-of-Life Option Act. One physician prescribes the medication, and the other physician gives a consulting opinion. If either physician is unable to determine if the individual has mental capacity in making the request, a mental health professional (psychiatrist or psychologist) must evaluate the individual and ensure that they are capable of making their own healthcare decisions.

In addition to the requirements listed above, steps must be followed in order for a person to qualify for a prescription for aid-in-dying medication. Please see Compassion & Choices' Colorado End-of-Life Option Act — Information for State Residents.

Is the Practice of Medical Aid in Dying Trusted?

Yes, because the eligibility requirements ensure that only mentally capable, terminally ill adults with a prognosis of six months or less who want the choice of a peaceful death are able to request and obtain aid-in-dying medication. In Colorado, the law specifically states that no person can qualify for aid-in-dying medication based on their disability or age.

In the more than 30 combined years of medical aid in dying in authorized states, there has not been a single instance of documented abuse. In Oregon, end-of-life care has improved overall since the law's implementation, in large part due to the dialogue the Death With Dignity Act encourages between people and their doctors. Hospice referrals are up, as is the use of palliative care. Oregon now has one of the lowest rates of in-hospital deaths and the highest rates of at-home deaths in the nation, and violent suicide among hospice patients has virtually disappeared. Almost two decades of rigorously observed and documented experience in Oregon shows us the law has worked as intended, with none of the problems opponents had predicted.

How Does the Public Feel About Medical Aid in Dying?

The American public consistently supports medical aid in dying by large majorities in independent national and state surveys. Polling outlets such as Gallup (72% support in May 2018)¹ and Harris (74% support in November 2014)² both report strong support for medical aid in dying.

¹ Brenan, Megan, American's Strong Support for Euthanasia Persists, May 2018. Available from: <https://news.gallup.com/poll/235145/americans-strong-support-euthanasia-persists.aspx>.

² Thompson, D. Most Americans Agree With Right-to-Die Movement. The Harris Poll. December 2014. Available from http://www.theharrispoll.com/health-and-life/Most_Americans_Agree_With_Right-to-Die_Movement.html.

How Does the Medical Profession Feel About Medical Aid in Dying?

A 2016 Medscape survey of 7,500 doctors representing 25 medical specialties demonstrated a significant increase in support for medical aid in dying from 2010. Today well over half (57%) of the physicians surveyed endorse the idea of medical aid in dying, agreeing that "Physician assisted death should be allowed for terminally ill patients."³

What Can I Do to Make Sure My Doctor Will Support Me if I Ever Want to Access Medical Aid in Dying?

Ask your doctor and medical providers now whether they will support your end-of-life choices, including medical aid in dying. This will encourage your medical providers to listen to your priorities and become prepared to provide you with the treatment you may want in the future. If your medical providers are unable or unwilling to support your end-of-life choices, you have the option to change your care to a healthcare team that puts your wishes first.

My Doctors Want to Better Understand Medical Aid in Dying; Where Can They Learn More?

Doctors can call Compassion & Choices' Doc2Doc consultation line at 800.247.7421 for

³ Medscape Ethics Report 2016: Life, Death, and Pain, December 23, 2016. Available from: <http://www.medscape.com/features/slideshow/ethics2016-part2#page=2>.

a free, confidential consultation and information on end-of-life care with our medical directors who have extensive medical aid-in-dying experience.

How Long Does the Process Take to Request and Obtain the Aid-in-Dying Medication?

The process to request and obtain aid-in-dying medication can be a lengthy one (and may not be successful) if you do not have a supportive healthcare team. The average length of time is between 15 days to three months and requires at least two doctor visits. Therefore, it is very important for individuals who may want to access the law to talk to their doctors early.

Where Can I Find the Necessary Forms?

You can find them at the Colorado State Department of Public Health & Environment website at colorado.gov/pacific/cdphe/medical-aid-dying and you can also access the patient request form at CompassionAndChoices.org/Colorado.

Are There Other Resources Available to Learn More About Medical Aid in Dying?

You can visit CompassionAndChoices.org/Colorado for more information, including videos, forms and other resources.

How Do I Talk to My Doctor or Hospice About Medical Aid in Dying?

Compassion & Choices has handouts on its website,

CompassionAndChoices.org/Colorado with tips on how to talk to your doctor about medical aid in dying, and how to interview a hospice to make sure that your medical team will support you in your choices.

Do All Doctors Have to Participate in Medical Aid in Dying?

No. Doctors and medical providers may choose whether to participate, so it is important to ask your healthcare team whether they will support your end-of-life choices. It is important to note that the law does not permit healthcare institutions or facilities to prohibit their doctors or staff from participating in medical aid in dying, including writing prescriptions, providing information about medical aid in dying, or referring patients to doctors who will support a terminally ill person's end-of-life choice. The one exception is that the law permits healthcare facilities to prohibit their doctors from prescribing a prescription for medical aid in dying if a terminally ill person plans on self-administering the medication on the healthcare facility's premises.

What Cause of Death is Listed on the Death Certificates of Individuals Who Have Accessed Medical Aid in Dying?

The underlying illness should be listed as the cause of death. The law specifies that a death resulting from self-administering aid-in-dying medication is not suicide.

Does Accessing Medical Aid in Dying Affect a Person's Will or Insurance?

Accessing medical aid in dying does not adversely affect a person's will or insurance. The law specifically mandates that wills, insurance, contracts and annuities are not affected if a qualified individual shortens their dying process by ingesting aid-in-dying medication.