

# Medical Aid in Dying Is NOT Suicide, Assisted Suicide or Euthanasia



**Medical aid in dying is fundamentally different from euthanasia.** Medical aid in dying is a practice by which a terminally ill, mentally capable person with a prognosis of six months or less chooses to request, obtain and take medication that brings about a peaceful death. In all authorized jurisdictions, only the dying person can request an aid-in-dying prescription under the law, and if and when they decide to ingest the medication, they must self-administer it. Therefore, control stays with the patient from beginning to end.

In contrast, euthanasia, sometimes called “mercy killing,” is an intentional act by which another person (not the dying person) acts to cause death. Euthanasia is illegal throughout the United States, and all medical aid-in-dying laws expressly prohibit euthanasia. Compassion & Choices does not support authorizing euthanasia because it would allow someone else — not the dying person — to cause the death of another.



**State legislatures and courts in states where the practice is authorized recognize medical aid in dying as differing from suicide, assisted suicide or euthanasia.** The conflation — intentional or accidental — of medical aid in dying with suicide perpetuates false, harmful and stigmatizing information. Suicide is a public health and medical concern that requires collective efforts to address. Medical aid in dying is available only to terminally ill people who are mentally capable with a prognosis of six months or less to live. Euthanasia and assisted suicide are both illegal in jurisdictions where medical aid in dying is authorized. Medical aid-in-dying laws on the books in California, Colorado, the District of

Columbia, Hawai'i, Maine, New Mexico, New Jersey, Oregon, Vermont and Washington state that actions taken in accordance with [the Act] do not, for any purpose, constitute suicide or assisted suicide. And in Montana, where assisted suicide is specifically illegal, the Montana Supreme Court ruled in *Baxter v. Montana* that “we find no indication in Montana law that physician aid in dying provided to terminally ill, mentally competent adult patients is against public policy.”



## Leading medical organizations reject the term “physician-assisted suicide.”

The American Academy of Hospice and Palliative Medicine, American Medical Women's Association, American Medical Student Association, American Academy of Family Physicians and American Public Health Association have all adopted policies opposing the use of the terms “suicide” and “assisted suicide” to describe the medical practice of aid in dying.



**The most prominent professional society in the United States addressing issues that arise at the interface of law and medicine rejects the term “physician-assisted suicide.”** The American College of Legal Medicine filed an amicus brief before the United States Supreme Court in 1996 rejecting the term and adopted a resolution in 2008 in which they “publicly advocat[ed the] elimination of the word ‘suicide’ from the lexicon created by a mentally competent, though terminally ill, person who wishes to be aided in dying.”

**DETAILED RESOURCE LIST LOCATED AT**  
[CompassionAndChoices.org/resource/not-assisted-suicide](https://www.compassionandchoices.org/resource/not-assisted-suicide)