



Volunteer Action Network Program Handbook: Medical Aid in Dying



This program handbook provides background information for volunteers about medical aid in dying and serves as a basic reference for volunteers working independently as advocates for medical aid in dying in their states. It is intended to give an overview of medical aid in dying; Compassion & Choices offers more detailed information and materials on a range of topics, and links to them can be found in the resources section of this document. **This handbook is designed to accompany the Volunteer Action Network Webinar Training: Medical Aid in Dying video; please use them together.**



SECTION I: Volunteer Action Network	/ 02
SECTION II: About Medical Aid in Dying	/ 03
SECTION III: Volunteer Activities	/ 04
SECTION IV: Training and Preparation	/ 06
SECTION V: Resources for Volunteers	/ 07
SECTION VI: Frequently Asked Questions	/ 09

SECTION I:

Volunteer Action Network

*Compassion & Choices (C&C) is the nation's oldest, largest and most active organization working to improve care and expand options for the end of life. **Our work is powered by the critical efforts of thousands of volunteers like you across the country.***



For each track there is a program handbook (like this one) and webinar training video that volunteers must review before taking action in that track.

About the Volunteer Action Network

The Compassion & Choices National Volunteer Program designed the Volunteer Action Network to support volunteer advocates in action and growth states. The Volunteer Action Network offers volunteers the opportunity to work on five main program areas, or tracks:

- » Medical Aid in Dying
- » Federal Policy
- » Public Speaking & Storytelling
- » Truth in Treatment
- » Access Campaign



All volunteers need to follow C&C policies and procedures.

Responsibilities and Expectations

Compassion & Choices' volunteers are ambassadors for the organization; in this role, we ask that your advocacy efforts align with our stated positions about medical aid in dying and end-of-life care. This ensures organizational consistency and accurate communication of fundamental concepts. Compassion & Choices' volunteers are also encouraged to proactively seek out opportunities to further your education on the issues we work on.

Goals for Volunteer Advocacy of Medical Aid in Dying:

- » Inspire communities and medical professionals to advocate for a full range of end-of-life options, including medical aid in dying for all Americans
- » Build coalitions around medical aid in dying
- » Educate medical professionals and policymakers about the practice of medical aid in dying
- » Push for local resolutions in support of medical aid in dying
- » Help authorize medical aid in dying in your state

SECTION II:

About Medical Aid in Dying



Medical aid in dying is currently authorized in six states, either through statute or court decision:

Oregon

(1997, ballot initiative)

Washington

(2008, ballot initiative)

Montana

(2009, state Supreme Court)

Vermont

(2013, legislation)

California

(2015, legislation)

Colorado

(2016, ballot initiative)

District of Columbia

(2017, legislation)

Medical aid in dying (also known as death with dignity) is when a terminally ill, mentally capable adult who has a prognosis of six months or less to live requests, obtains and — if their suffering becomes unbearable — self-ingests medication that brings about a peaceful death.

Prior to providing a prescription for such medication, doctors must confirm that the person is fully informed and provide the person with information about additional end-of-life options, including comfort care, hospice and pain control. A doctor must also determine that the person is mentally capable of making their own healthcare decisions.

Medical aid in dying is a safe and trusted medical practice; in fact, the prestigious and peer-reviewed Journal of Palliative Medicine published clinical criteria for medical aid in dying, which physicians use to ensure that the practice meets the highest standards of care.

The states that authorized medical aid in dying through legislation modeled their bills after Oregon's Death With Dignity Act. In those states, medical aid in dying is available to adults who are decisionally capable and terminally ill, with six months or less to live.

Each state's regulatory and procedural requirements differ slightly, but all the legislation includes the following provisions, among others:

- » The person must be fully informed of all their options
- » The person must request the prescription from a physician and be free from undue influence or coercion
- » The person must be able to ingest the medication by themselves
- » The physician must offer the person multiple opportunities to take back the request for aid-in-dying medication
- » Two witnesses must sign the request form confirming that the request is voluntary
- » Wills, contracts, insurance and annuity policies are not affected by a person choosing medical aid in dying
- » Medical aid in dying is not considered suicide or assisted suicide



Detailed information on several aspects of medical aid in dying is available in the fact sheets online at [CompassionAndChoices.org/understand-medical-aid-in-dying](https://www.compassionandchoices.org/understand-medical-aid-in-dying).

SECTION III:

Volunteer Activities

Compassion & Choices advocates for laws and policies to improve end-of-life care and expand end-of-life options. Across the country we rely on volunteers to support our work with local and national efforts:

- » Writing public officials and gathering signatures on petitions
- » Networking locally to build support for end-of-life options
- » Attending key rallies and events around the country to show our strength

Our work happens at the federal, state and local levels, often with the leadership of our vast network of committed volunteers. Together we SUPPORT, EDUCATE and ADVOCATE.

Support

Is What We Need Most From Our Volunteers:

- » Gather petition signatures and write public officials
- » Host a house party in support of the end-of-life options
- » Work to pass a local resolution in support of medical aid in dying
- » Write an op-ed piece or letter to the editor about one of our issues
- » Make a financial contribution and raise money locally

Find specialized toolkits for the activities above in the online Volunteer Resource Center, and see the Quarterly Action Bulletin for the latest Compassion & Choices' medical aid-in-dying actions at CompassionAnd-Choices.org/volunteer-resource-center.

Educate

Ourselves and Each Other Is What We Can Do Together:

- » Plan and deliver a local presentation on end-of-life care and options
- » Share your stories online

- » Share news and information on social media
- » Learn more about and stay up to date on critical issues

Use Compassion & Choices' training materials to learn more about medical aid in dying and end-of-life care at CompassionAndChoices.org/volunteer-resource-center.

Advocate

Is What Compassion & Choices Does on Behalf of the Movement:

- » Provide legislative testimony and advocacy
- » Pursue litigation in high-profile cases
- » Work to pass laws and initiatives
- » Organize throughout communities
- » Implement local, state, and national strategies

Learn more about our current work at CompassionAndChoices.org/news.

SECTION IV:

Training and Preparation

All volunteers working with Compassion & Choices must use the same up-to-date and accurate information in their advocacy, and should review and/or complete the following training resources, which can be found on the Volunteer Resource Center webpage at CompassionAndChoices.org/volunteer-resource-center.

Overview of Medical Aid in Dying

In addition to this program handbook, all volunteers working on actions in the medical aid-in-dying program track should also watch the Volunteer Action Network Webinar Training: Medical Aid in Dying video.

Compassion & Choices General Orientation

Compassion & Choices is a dynamic organization working on a variety of issues related to end-of-life care and choice. Review this brief video for an overview on all our activities.

Oregon's Experience With Medical Aid in Dying

This scientific journal article by Compassion & Choices' President Barbara Coombs Lee provides a data-driven, scientific review of Oregon's experience authorizing and making available medical aid in dying.

Medical Aid-in-Dying Fact Sheets

Published as online resources, our medical aid-in-dying fact sheets offer detailed information on numerous topics related to medical aid in dying and should be reviewed periodically and turned to as a quick reference. Visit the "Understanding the Issues" webpage on our website for links to these fact sheets: CompassionAndChoices.org/understand-medical-aid-in-dying.

SECTION V:

Resources for Volunteers

Compassion & Choices has developed a suite of Volunteer Action Network resources to support volunteers across the country. Familiarize yourself with the resources below — and look for even more on our website CompassionAndChoices.org/volunteer-resource-center — to get started today!

Informational Resources About Medical Aid in Dying

- » Aid-in-Dying History and Background
- » Oregon's Experience With Medical Aid in Dying
- » Compassion & Choices Website (CompassionAndChoices.org)

General Advocacy Resources From Compassion & Choices

- » Letter Writing Toolkit
- » Local Resolutions Toolkit
- » House Party Host Handbook
- » Petitions, Tabling and Canvassing Toolkit
- » Social Media Toolkit
- » Student Activity Guide

Other Resources

- » "How to Die in Oregon" Home Screening Kit
- » Barbara Mancini DVD and Discussion Kit
- » Compassion & Choices Online Magazine
- » Compassion & Choices Newsroom
- » Medical Associations Handbook

Ongoing Support and Assistance for Volunteers

Compassion & Choices is committed to building a strong base of volunteers to support improved care and expanded choice at the end of life for all Americans. In order to accomplish this, we need our volunteers to work as independently as possible — that's why we have created this suite of DIY resources:

- » Program handbooks and webinar training videos for each of the five program tracks provide an overview of the topics and helpful resources with timely actions you can take
- » The Quarterly Action Bulletin published by the National Volunteer Program is sent to volunteers to guide their work in support of the end-of-life options movement
- » Periodic e-alerts to keep volunteers involved in nationally relevant advocacy efforts
- » Brown-bag seminars (live and recorded) provide continued opportunities for learning and skills-building
- » Volunteer Resource Center for additional online toolkits and resources.

If you have been assigned to an Action Team, your Action Team leader is your primary resource for information, support and direction. Your Action Team leader has information about local goals and objectives for your area, and can provide additional training and information as needed.

If you live in a state without an Action Team and are interested in leading local volunteer efforts, please contact Compassion & Choices National Volunteer Program at: volunteer@CompassionAndChoices.org

SECTION VI:

Frequently Asked Questions

What Is Compassion & Choices?

Compassion & Choices is the nation's oldest, largest and most active nonprofit working to improve care and expand options for the end of life. For more than 30 years we have worked to change attitudes, practices and policies so that everyone can access the information and options they need for more control and comfort at the end of life.

What Is Medical Aid in Dying?

Medical aid in dying is the practice in which a mentally capable, terminally ill adult with less than six months to live requests medication from their doctor for self-administration to bring about a peaceful death if their suffering becomes unbearable. Many do not take the medication, but simply having it on hand — even just the option to request it — greatly relieves anxiety.

Do Doctors Support Medical Aid in Dying?

A 2016 online survey conducted by Medscape of 7,500 U.S. doctors representing 25 medical specialties indicates doctors in the United States support — by a 28-percent margin (57 percent vs. 29 percent) — the decision of a patient with an “incurable and terminal” disease who wants to end their own life. By the same margin, doctors say they would also want this option for themselves.

How Do Medical Aid-in-Dying Laws Differ?

Medical aid-in-dying laws (Oregon, Washington, Vermont, California, Colorado, and the District of Columbia) are all similar and modeled on Oregon's law. Each has core protections in place to ensure the laws work as intended. For example, core safeguards include that anyone seeking medical aid in dying (1) must be terminally ill and mentally capable, (2) must make the request on their own behalf, (3) may withdraw their request or decide not to use the medication, and (4) must self-administer the medication. Compassion & Choices supports the proven core safeguards found in the Oregon law.

Where Does the American Public Stand on Medical Aid in Dying?

Consistently large majorities across generations, genders, educational groups and even political affiliations as measured by independent polling outlets such as Gallup (69% support in May 2016), LifeWay Research (67% support in September/October 2016) and Harris (74% support in November 2014) favor legislation to authorize medical aid in dying. A 2015 Gallup poll also noted that support “has risen nearly 20 points in then last two years and stands at the highest level in more than a decade,” and support among young adults ages 18 to 34 “climbed 19 points this year, to 81%.” State-by-state polling also indicates majority support that cuts across demographics.

Why Is It Wrong to Equate Medical Aid in Dying With Assisted Suicide?

Factually, legally and medically speaking, it is inaccurate. The Oregon, Washington, Vermont, California, Colorado, and District of Columbia laws are clear: “Actions taken in accordance with [the Act] shall not, for any purpose, constitute suicide, assisted suicide, mercy killing or homicide, under the law.” This is because a person who is choosing medical aid in dying already has a terminal prognosis of six months or less to live. They are not choosing to die; the disease is taking their life. They are simply choosing not to prolong a difficult and painful dying process. Assisting a suicide remains a felony in states where medical aid in dying is authorized. Saying “assisted suicide” uses the language of a crime to describe a legitimate medical practice.



Care and Choice at the End of Life

CompassionAndChoices.org

Compassion & Choices is the nation's oldest, largest and most active nonprofit working to improve care and expand options for the end of life. We:

Support patients and families

Educate the public and professionals

Advocate across the nation
