

# How to Talk to Your Doctor about Medical Aid in Dying in California

## Talking with your doctor about medical aid in dying

Discuss your end-of-life priorities with your medical team now to ensure the options you want will be available to you. Confirm that your doctor will support your choices.

## Suggestions for starting the conversation

For those who *do not* have a terminal illness:

*I value quality of life. Should I become terminally ill and no longer able to enjoy living, I would like to have the option of medical aid in dying.*

*I hope you will honor my decisions and respect my values, as I respect yours. Would you write an aid-in-dying prescription in accordance with the law if I qualify? If you will never be willing to honor my request, please tell me now.*

For those who *do* have a terminal illness:

*I want to have the authorized option to advance the time of my death if my suffering becomes unbearable.*

*Am I eligible for medical aid in dying? If yes, will you write a prescription in accordance with the California End of Life Option Act? If not, will you refer me to a doctor who is willing to write a prescription?*

*If I am not eligible, what will my condition look like when I am eligible?*

**No one but you can make this request to your doctor(s).** And it is important to ask *only your doctor*; do not ask your physician's office staff, nurse or physician's assistant, or leave a request on voicemail.

You may mention that Compassion & Choices provides assistance to physicians through our **Doc2Doc Program**, which offers free, confidential telephone consultation with a seasoned medical director. Please feel free to give your physician our Doc2Doc flier or the Doc2Doc phone number: 1-800-247-7421.

## What Is Medical Aid in Dying?

Medical aid in dying (also known as death with dignity) is a medical practice in which a terminally ill, mentally capable adult with a prognosis of six months or less to live may request, obtain and - if their suffering becomes unbearable - self-ingest medication that brings about a peaceful death.

## California's End of Life Option Act

California's End of Life Option Act allows physicians to prescribe medication for their terminally ill patients to shorten a prolonged and unbearable dying process under strict guidelines.

To be eligible to use the law, an individual must be:

- > Age 18 or older
- > Diagnosed with a terminal illness
- > Given six months or less to live
- > Capable of making healthcare decisions

An individual must also be:

- > A resident of California
- > Capable of self-administering and ingesting the aid-in-dying medication
- > Fully informed of all her or his end-of-life options

Please note that eligibility to use the medical aid in dying law is not the same as eligibility for hospice.

Two California physicians must agree that you are eligible to use the California 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 your mental capacity in making the request, a mental health professional (psychiatrist or psychologist) must evaluate you and ensure that you are capable of making your own healthcare decisions.

**You may change your mind at any time.** You may at any time withdraw or rescind your request for a prescription for medical aid in dying, and there is no obligation to take the medication once you have it in your possession.

Please see additional Compassion & Choices materials on California's End of Life Option Act at <http://www.endoflifeoption.org/>.

For more information about the full range of end-of-life options please visit <http://www.compassionandchoices.org/information>.