

California End of Life Option Act: Transforming End-of-Life Care

The California End of Life Option Act went into effect on June 9, 2016. This historic moment, in the nation's most populous state, secured the right for mentally capable, terminally ill adults to request from their physician a prescription for aid-in-dying medication to self-administer if their suffering becomes unbearable.

Compassion & Choices' California Access Campaign

The bilingual California Access Campaign has experienced tremendous success in helping to implement the End of Life Option Act, and this is just the beginning! However, significant challenges and barriers still exist to ensuring that people in need can use the law, including lack of physician training and comfort in discussing end-of-life issues, healthcare systems that "opt out" and prevent their doctors from providing medical aid in dying, and confusion by patients and families about their rights and how to access the law.

The Access Campaign's three goals are:

- > To ensure that Californians understand their rights and can choose from the full range of end-of-life care options, including medical aid in dying.
- > To assist to doctors so they can inform their patients about the full range of end-of-life options and provide the care their patients want.
- > To provide technical support to healthcare systems so they adopt policies supportive of patient choice.

Compassion & Choices' California Access Campaign is helping to drive implementation of the state's medical aid-in-dying law, changing the way end-of-life care is delivered and transforming the practice of medical aid in dying by integrating it into the standard of care.

Successes!

Healthcare Consumer Education

- > The Find Care Tool, an innovative online tool for finding healthcare facilities in California supportive of patient choice was launched on www.endoflifeoption.org.
- > Multiple videos on medical aid in dying are posted on www.endoflifeoption.org as a resource to physicians.

Health Insurance Providers

- > Medi-Cal, the state insurance which covers approximately one-third of California residents, has determined that it will cover the practice of medical aid in dying, including paying for medication. Of five states with authorized aid in dying, California will be the second, after Oregon, to direct public funds toward such benefits.
- > Large private insurers such as Blue Shield of California, Kaiser Permanente, Anthem Blue Cross and Health Net are committing to covering the cost of the insured who choose to access the End of Life Option Act, as well as continuing coverage for services including hospice and palliative care.

Healthcare Systems

- Most of the largest healthcare systems in California including Kaiser Permanente, Sutter Health, the University of California system (UCSF, UCLA, UCD, UCI and UCSD), Stanford, Huntington Hospital and Adventist Health have adopted policies supportive of patient choice, including allowing their physicians to provide medical aid in dying.
- Many large healthcare systems have established dedicated resources such as Patient Navigators to support patients through the aid-in-dying process.
- The majority of hospice facilities are adopting policies supportive of patient choice including medical aid in dying, such as the four largest providers in the state: Mission Hospice, Gentiva Hospice, Hinds Hospice and Heart of Hospice.
- Adventist Health, a large faith-based hospital system, dropped its long-standing opposition to its doctors practicing medical aid in dying. Also, Brookdale, a senior living system which offers services from independent living to long-term care, removed its long-standing prohibition to medical aid in dying.

Major continuing-care retirement communities such as Alliance, North Bay, Brookdale and Pathways are adopting policies supportive of patient choice.

Medical Associations

- The California Medical Association dropped opposition to medical aid in dying prior to the End of Life Option Act being enacted, released a guide and provided free webinars on the law for its members.
- The California Hospice and Palliative Care Association hosted multiple webinars on the End of Life Option Act and provided sample operational policies to its members.
- Additional free webinars and trainings were hosted by:
 - The California Hospital Association
 - The California Academy of Family Physicians
 - California Pharmacists Association
 - California Department of Managed Health

Compassion & Choices, the nation's oldest, largest and most active nonprofit organization committed to improving care and expanding choice for the end of life, has more than 20 years of experience helping to pass and implement medical aid-in-dying laws in Oregon (1997), Washington (2008), Montana (2009), Vermont (2013) and California (2015).