

Statistical Report on the YouGov Survey  
of the  
Attitudes of Canberrans to Wider Eligibility for  
Voluntary Assisted Dying in the ACT



Commissioned by Canberrans for a Good Death  
June 2024

Authorship and acknowledgements.

This report was written by Roy Harvey. The opinions expressed are those of the author.

I acknowledge the valuable support from Marion McEwin for assistance with survey design and statistical analysis, and from Linda Hort for discussions on survey design and interpretation of results. Finally, I acknowledge the financial contribution of Dying with Dignity ACT towards the cost of the survey.

This report was cleared for release by YouGov 1 September 2024

The report will be available from 10 September 2024 from [canberransforagooddeath.net](https://canberransforagooddeath.net) under the Survey tab.

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## Background to the Survey

In 2023, the Australian Capital Territory government held consultations on the form of voluntary assisted dying (VAD) that would be adopted in the ACT, with community groups (patients, welfare, clinical, First Nations, other special interests). It also invited submissions from individuals and groups. In December 2023 it made public a draft Voluntary Assisted Dying Bill 2023. The ACT Legislative Assembly established a Select Committee to consider the Bill and to hold hearings on it. The Select Committee invited submissions and invited several people who had made submissions to appear before it.

The Select Committee made several small modifications to the Bill, and following debate in the Legislative Assembly, the Voluntary Assisted Dying ACT 2024 became law. It will operate from November 2025.

The VAD Act is very similar to the VAD laws in all Australian states. The Australian Model, as it is often called, is amongst the most restrictive of any jurisdictions in the world that permits VAD.

During the consultations in 2023, and in submissions to the Select Committee in 2024, there were a series of proposals by individuals and community groups to widened eligibility for VAD, thus giving more people access to VAD. No proposal that was not in the Australian Model was accepted.

The wider eligibility criteria advocated for by many groups and individuals related mainly to persons with intolerable suffering and a progressive reduction in physical, mental, and social capacities. The Australian Model also requires that as well as these factors, a person must be close to the end of life. Many conditions can result in people being almost totally incapacitated for many years before being close to the end of life, and suffer intolerably for this long period.

The Australian Model also requires that a person has decision-making capacity from the time they first apply for VAD until they actually take the VAD substance. If a person loses decision-making capacity at any stage, they are not eligible for VAD and it would be illegal for anyone to assisted them carry out their intentions. Many conditions, such as advanced dementia, can result in a person losing decision-making capacity many years before they are close to the end of their life.

There was considerable community support for individuals to be able to make some binding form of Advance Directive that would give them access to VAD should they have some accident or condition that caused them to lose decision-making capacity and be in a state that they did not want to endure.

Canberrans for a Good Death, is a group of people from Dying with Dignity ACT and Exit International ACT, who made submissions supporting widening the eligibility to VAD and for being able to make some form of binding Advance Directive.

The questions in the survey were designed to find what the Canberra community thinks of these issues.

## Report on the Survey Results

YouGov was selected to undertake this survey after discussion with four other survey companies. The complexity of the issues associated with Voluntary Assisted Dying is such, that automated phone surveys and other simpler techniques were considered by the companies to be inappropriate. YouGov could provide a sample of about 600 respondents from its panel, while other companies could only offer panels of 200-300 respondents. YouGov is a worldwide company with a reputation for providing credible survey results.

The detailed methodology is provided in the last section of the Report.

The Canberrans for a Good Death provided 6 questions for inclusion in the survey, 5 of which had been derived from public submissions to ACT during the development of the VAD Bill, from the results of a government survey conducted as part of the development process, and from submissions to the Legislative Assembly Select Committee and testimony during its hearings.

The YouGov panellists have provided information on demographics, religious affiliation, past voting patterns, income, home ownership, education, and a range of other factors. This allowed for the responses to the 6 questions to be cross tabulated to this wide range of other information.

### NOTE

1. In the following tables, (unless otherwise specified) all percentages are survey estimates derived by weighting the data using benchmarks at the age, gender, and education level.
2. The number of respondents is the actual number of people in the sample.
3. In a few instances percentages do not sum across the rows to 100 due to rounding.

## Question 1 – Attitudes to Voluntary Assisted Dying in the ACT

**Introductory Text** Q1 The ACT, voluntary assisted dying (VAD) will be ‘medical help to end your life at a time you choose’. The ACT Legislative Assembly has passed a law to permit voluntary assisted dying for persons who are experiencing intolerable suffering, have a disease that will cause them to die, are approaching the end of life, have declining functioning and quality of life, have decision making capacity, and make repeated voluntary requests for voluntary assisted dying. Persons under 18 years of age, and persons who have a disability, mental disorder or mental illness are excluded.  
Voluntary Assisted Dying is not available in the ACT until November 2025.

**Question 1** How strongly do you support or oppose voluntary assisted dying being made available to ACT residents?

Strongly Oppose      Oppose      Unsure, don't know      Support      Strongly Support

Question 1 responses by ACT Voting Intention						
	Labor	Liberal	Greens	Other	Undecided	All Voters
Total Support %	82	68	89	77	69	77
Unsure or don't know %	12	16	6	9	24	13
Total Oppose %	6	16	6	14	7	10
TOTAL %	100	100	100	100	100	100
Number of respondents	227	145	93	95	69	629

Question 1 responses by Religious Affiliation					
	No religion	Catholic	Other Christian	Other Religions	All Affiliations
Total Support %	88	66	65	60	77
Unsure or don't know %	8	21	14	22	13
Total Oppose %	4	13	21	18	10
TOTAL %	100	100	100	100	100
Number of respondents	361	84	121	63	629

Question 1 responses by Age ranges						
	18-24	25-34	35-49	50-64	65+	All Ages
Total Support %	65	83	77	77	80	77
Unsure or don't know %	24	11	12	12	10	13
Total Oppose %	11	6	11	11	10	10
TOTAL %	100	100	100	100	100	100
Number of respondents	70	132	192	140	95	629

**Party Affiliation:** The survey shows a high level of support for VAD across all political persuasions. Labor/Greens (82-89%) support is higher than for Liberal/others (68-77%). About 10% of respondents Opposed VAD outright.

**Religious Affiliation:** The survey shows a high level of support for VAD regardless of religion. Those responding no religion were higher (88%) than those with a religion (60-66%). Catholic respondents had 66% support. The groups indicating most opposition were Other Christian (21%) and Other Religions (18%) compared with 13% of Catholics.

**Age ranges:** There was little discernible pattern in support across the 25+ age groups (77-83%), but the 18-24 age group (65%) showed lower support. Young people may be less likely to have given this issue so much thought.

## Question 2 – Possible role for Advance Care Plan in Voluntary Assisted Dying Access

**Introductory text Q2** There are many circumstances in which persons lose decision-making capacity before requesting voluntary assisted dying. They are then not eligible to request VAD. A person may lose decision-making capacity as a result of an accident, disease, dementia resulting in loss of mental capacity, or other factors. ACT Law currently allows a person with decision-making capacity to make an Advance Care Plan about their preferences for health treatments if that person should lose their decision-making capacity. These options include stopping or withdrawing lifesaving treatments, which would lead to a ‘natural death’

**Question 2** Should a person be allowed to include their wishes about voluntary assisted dying in some form of Advance Care Plan?

Support                      Unsure or undecided                      Oppose

Question 2 responses by ACT Voting Intention						
	Labor	Liberal	Greens	Other	Undecided	All Voters
Support %	80	73	84	74	66	77
Unsure or undecided %	15	16	12	11	29	16
Oppose %	5	11	4	14	4	8
TOTAL %	100	100	100	100	100	100
Number of respondents	227	145	93	95	69	629

Question 2 responses by Religious Affiliation					
	No religion	Catholic	Other Christian	Other religions	All Affiliations
Support %	81	65	74	73	77
Unsure or undecided %	14	20	16	16	16
Oppose %	4	15	10	11	8
TOTAL %	100	100	100	100	100
Number of respondents	361	84	121	63	629

Question 2 responses by Age Ranges						
	18-24	25-34	35-49	50-64	65+	All Ages
Support %	66	85	70	77	86	77
Unsure or undecided %	23	9	20	16	9	16
Oppose %	11	6	10	6	5	8
TOTAL %	100	100	100	100	100	100
Number of respondents	70	132	192	140	95	629

With respect to taking account of the inclusion of wishes for VAD in an Advance Care Plan

**Party Affiliation:** There was a high level of support across all political persuasions with again, Labor/Greens (80-84%) showing higher support than Liberal/ Other (66-74%). Opposition ranged from 4-14%

**Religious Affiliation:** There was a high level of support regardless of religion. Those with no religion were most supportive (81%) and the response for those with a religion varied from 65-74%. Opposition was 4-15%.

**Age Ranges:** The response pattern to this question was similar to the attitudes to Q1 with the 18-24 age group having lower support.

### Question 3 – Access to VAD for persons with intolerable suffering and diminishing capacities, with a condition that will cause death, but who are not close to death

**Introductory text 3:** There are health conditions which cause death where people can experience intolerable suffering and diminishing physical function and declining quality of life for many years, such as Motor Neurone Disease. They are not eligible for voluntary assisted dying until being close to death.

**Question 3** For people suffering intolerably from health conditions that will eventually cause death, do you support or oppose them being allowed to request voluntary assisted dying if they consider their quality of life is significantly diminished?

Support                      Unsure or undecided                      Oppose

Question 3 responses by ACT Voting Intention						
	Labor	Liberal	Greens	Other	Undecided	All Voters
Support %	84	78	86	76	76	81
Unsure or undecided %	13	12	11	13	15	13
Oppose %	2	10	3	11	9	6
TOTAL %	100	100	100	100	100	100
Number of respondents	227	145	93	95	69	629

Question 3 responses by Religious Affiliation					
	No religion	Catholic	Other Christian	Other religions	All Affiliations
Support %	87	77	69	77	81
Unsure or undecided %	10	12	23	8	
Oppose %	3	11	8	15	6
TOTAL %	100	100	100	100	100
Number of respondents	361	84	121	63	629

Question 3 Responses by Age Ranges						
	18-24	25-34	35-49	50-64	65+	All Ages
Support %	76	85	80	81	83	80
Unsure or undecided %	23	11	11	11	14	13
Oppose %	2	4	9	8	4	6
TOTAL %	100	100	100	100	100	100
Number of respondents	70	132	192	140	95	629

With respect to extending VAD for those people who otherwise meet current criteria but are not close to death

**Party Affiliation:** Again, there was a high level of support across all political persuasions with Labor/Greens (84-86%) showing higher support than Liberal/ Others (76-78%). It is interesting to note that when the question related to very specific health circumstances, the difference between the two groups of parties reduced.

**Religious Affiliation:** There was a high level of support, regardless of religion. Of note is that when the question was about very specific health circumstances, support by Catholics increased significantly from 65% in Question 2 to 77% in Question 3.



**Age Ranges:** Across age ranges, (including 18-24), the percentages of support were much closer to one another than for earlier questions. Again, responses may have been influenced by reference to very specific health circumstances.

## Question 4 – Access to VAD for persons with intolerable suffering, diminishing capacities, with a condition that will not cause death, but for whom there are no acceptable treatments

**Introductory text Q4:** There are health conditions which do not cause death but where people experience intolerable suffering and diminishing physical function and declining quality of life for many years. This includes persons with untreatable chronic pain, and persons with mental health issues for which there is no effective treatment. They are excluded from access to VAD.

**Question 4** For people who are suffering intolerably, but do not have conditions which will cause death, do you support or oppose them being allowed to request voluntary assisted dying if they consider their quality of life is significantly diminished?

Support                  Unsure or undecided          Oppose

Question 4 responses by ACT Voting Intention						
	Labor	Liberal	Greens	Other	Undecided	All Voters
Support %	56	48	70	59	50	56
Unsure or undecided %	29	37	18	25	38	30
Oppose %	15	16	12	16	11	15
TOTAL %	100	100	100	100	100	100
Number of respondents	227	145	93	95	69	629

Question 4 responses by Religious Affiliation					
	No religion	Catholic	Other Christian	Other religions	All Affiliations
Support %	63	52	42	50	56
Unsure or undecided %	28	28	40	20	30
Oppose %	9	20	18	31	15
TOTAL %	100	100	100	100	100
Number of respondents	361	84	121	30	629

Question 4 responses by Age Ranges						
	18-24	25-34	35-49	50-64	65+	All Ages
Support %	53	61	54	56	56	56
Unsure or undecided %	25	24	32	29	34	30
Oppose %	23	15	14	15	9	15
TOTAL %	100	100	100	100	100	100
Number of respondents	70	132	192	140	95	629

With respect to extending VAD for those people who are not close to death, but are suffering intolerably from a condition that will not cause death but has no acceptable treatments

**Party Affiliation:** The survey showed that a majority support this across all parties, except for the Liberals reported 48% support. It is of note that a substantial proportion of the reduction in support in Q3 compared to Q4 went to unsure or don't know. Opposition was highest amongst the Liberals (37%) and Undecided Voters (38%), while for Greens, only 18% were opposed.

**Religious Affiliation:** There was majority support for this proposal across all affiliations, and a fairly uniform reduction compared to Q3 responses – 24% -27%. Comparing responses to Q3 and Q4, Total opposition to the proposal increased by 6-16%, and the increase of unsure/don't know was 12-17%.

**Age Ranges:** There was majority support for this proposition 53-61%. This was a reduction of support across age ranges when comparing the responses to Q3 to Q4 – 23-27%. Every age range also showed an increase of unsure/don't know.

## Question 5 – When should eligibility conditions for VAD be reviewed

**Introductory text Q5:** The ACT Voluntary Assisted Dying Act 2024 provides for a review to be conducted no sooner than November 2028 to examine the issues raised in this survey.

**Question 5** Do you think that the ACT Legislative Assembly should move to expand access to voluntary assisted dying?

Options: \* In the next term of the Legislative Assembly (starting November 2024)

\* In the time frame in the current ACT legislation (probably not earlier than 2030)

\* Never

\* Unsure or undecided

Question 5 responses by ACT Voting Intention						
	Labor	Liberal	Greens	Other	Undecided	All Voters
In the next term %	56	48	49	59	54	53
As set out in VAD Act %	26	22	27	23	16	24
Never %	2	13	1	12	8	7
Unsure or undecided %	16	17	24	7	22	17
TOTAL %	100	100	100	100	100	100
Number of respondents	227	145	93	95	69	629

Question 5 responses by Religious Affiliation					
	No religion	Catholic	Other Christian	Other religions	All Affiliations
In the next term %	60	45	43	47	53
As set out in VAD Act %	22	26	26	22	24
Never %	2	13	13	12	7
Unsure or undecided	16	17	19	19	17
TOTAL %	100	100	100	100	100
Number of respondents	361	84	121	63	629

Question 5 responses by Age ranges						
	18-24	25-34	35-49	50-64	65+	All Ages
In the next term %	41	51	49	57	64	53
As set out in VAD Act %	28	29	30	19	11	24
Never	5	6	6	9	7	7
Unsure or undecided %	26	15	15	15	17	17
TOTAL %	100	100	100	100	100	100
Number of respondents	70	132	192	140	95	629

This question showed a majority of people in the ACT (77%) are in favour of expanding access to VAD, either in the next term of the Legislative Assembly 53%, with 24% in favour of leaving it until 2028-29. Only 7% opposed reform.

**Political Affiliation:** All affiliations showed strong support (69-82%) for expanding access to VAD and a sizeable majority of those in support, favoured reform in the next term of the Legislative Assembly. Labor/Greens voters were much less likely to be opposed to reform (1-2%) compared with Liberal and Other parties (12-13%). There was a big variation in those who were unsure/don't know about when the reforms should take place 7-24%.

**Religious Affiliation:** All religious affiliations showed strong support (70-82%) for expanding access to VAD and a sizeable majority of those in support, favoured reform in the next term of the Legislative Assembly. As with previous questions, there was a significant difference between respondents with no religion and those with a religious affiliation: 60% of those with no religion were in favour of reform in the next term of the Legislative

Assembly, compared with 43-47% of respondents with a religious affiliation. Opposition to any reform was 2% for persons with no religion and 12-13% for those people with a religious affiliation.

**Age Ranges:** There was greater variation across age ranges than for other questions but no significant pattern.

## Question 6 – Open-ended question

**Question 6.** Do you have any comments you would like to make about the issues raised here concerning voluntary assisted dying in the ACT?

There was no introductory text for this question.

Question 6 Comments grouped by YouGov - No weightings applied		
Group		%
1	Nothing to add/ no comments/ No	51
2	Support VAD because of personal choice/ decision/ end suffering aspect	20
3	General support for VAD/ should be available asap	14
4	Should be considered - case x case/ need more information/ consultation	6
5	Undecided on the topic	3
6	Should not be allowed/ not support	3
7	Potential exploitation	2
8	Support VAD - wants brain patients included	1
9	Current measures are enough - i.e. pain relief	1
10	Not an urgent issue to focus on	<1
	TOTAL %	<b>100</b>
	Number of respondents	629

Just over half of all respondents had nothing to add or no comments.

There were 35% (Groups 2, 3, 8) who wanted changes to the existing Act. (This was 71% of those who made a comment).

There were 6% of responses Groups (6, 7, 9) who opposed VAD or who thought current measures were enough – (12% of those who commented). For these responses, a large proportion made specific reference to their religious views.

Group 4 (Should be considered - case x case/ need more information/ consultation) comprised about 6% – (12% of those who made a comment) Many were concerned about mental health issues and capacity for choice.

Group 5 (undecided on topic) were 3% of cases. Their responses ranged from simply ‘just don’t know’ to expressing varying emotions about the death of family members.

Less than 1% of respondents thought that VAD reform was ‘not an urgent issue’.

## YouGov Survey Methodology

YouGov was selected to undertake this survey after discussion with four other survey companies. The complexity of the issues associated with Voluntary Assisted Dying is such, that automated phone surveys and other simpler techniques were considered by the companies to be inappropriate. The YouGov panel could provide a sample of about 600 respondents in the ACT, while other companies could only offer panels of 200-300 respondents. YouGov is a worldwide company with a reputation of providing credible survey results.

### Questions

The Canberrans for a Good Death provided six questions for inclusion in the survey, five of which had been derived from public submissions to ACT during the development of the VAD Bill and from the results of a survey conducted by YourSay (ACT government) as part of the VAD Bill's development process. Similar issues arose in submissions to the Legislative Assembly Select Committee and testimony during its hearings. In recognition of the nature and potential sensitivity of the survey, a sixth open-ended question provided respondents with the opportunity to add any write-in comments.

The YouGov panellists have provided information on demographics, religious affiliation, voting patterns, income, home ownership, education, and a range of other factors. This allowed for the responses to the six questions to be cross tabulated to this wide range of other information.

### Sample enumeration

The survey has been conducted using an online interview administered to members of the YouGov Australian panel of over 70,000 individuals who have agreed to take part in surveys. Emails were sent to Australians eligible to vote in the ACT selected at random from the base sample of panellists. The email invited them to take part in the survey and provided a generic survey link.

The total sample size was 629 persons eligible to vote in the ACT. Fieldwork was undertaken from 24 July to 6 August 2024.

### Estimation

To produce estimates for the total population each respondent is assigned a survey weight. These weights are derived by calibrating the sample against independently determined population characteristics (known as benchmarks). This corrects for any over or under-representation in the sample with respect to the whole population. The population characteristics used were age, gender, and education level. Given that the sample drawn for this survey was also used to measure voting intentions for up-coming elections, benchmarks on voting patterns at the 2022 Federal election and the 2023 voice referendum were also used.

## Reliability and validity of results

As the survey results are based on a sample, they are subject to statistical errors normally associated with sample-based information. These errors are greater (in relative terms) for figures that relate to a small proportion of the population. This also means that the more the results are disaggregated the less reliable will be some of the figures. In the tables presented in this report comparisons are best based on aggregations across the columns, but the more detailed classification is provided to allow users flexibility to combine different columns. They also allow for patterns in the results to be discerned.

When comparing two figures there is a higher degree of confidence that differences between those based on larger sample sizes will be statistically significant than for those based on smaller samples. To assist users with this, all tables include counts of the number of respondents across the classification presented.

Survey estimates have also been examined for coherence with concepts underlying each of the questions. This combined with the consistency of disaggregation by religion and voting intentions across the various questions suggests that the observed differences are valid.