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### **Changing Canadian attitudes toward euthanasia**

*A recent Environics poll commissioned by Life Canada suggests diminishing support for legalized euthanasia*

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A poll released on November 3, 2010 shows some encouraging results with regards to Canadian attitudes toward legalized euthanasia. Support for legalized euthanasia is declining, and concern about end-of-life care is rising. The poll was commissioned by Life Canada, a national pro-life education group and conducted by Environics Canada.

The poll found a decrease in the number of Canadians who strongly support legalized euthanasia from 2009. "There has been a three point decline (from 25 per cent to 21 per cent) in the proportion of Canadians who strongly support the legalization of voluntary euthanasia," reads the poll. [1]

At the same time, the poll shows that concerns about abuse in the context of non-voluntary euthanasia (euthanasia without consent) are very high. "Almost eight in ten Canadians express concern that legalized euthanasia would lead to a significant number of the sick, disabled or elderly being euthanized without their consent, and this proportion is up eight per cent since 2009."

Canadians are taking note of the reality of cost pressures in health care as well. Says Life Canada: "Almost two thirds (63 per cent) of Canadians express concern that the elderly would feel pressured to accept euthanasia in order to reduce health care costs, up seven per cent since 2009."

Support for legalized euthanasia is strongest in Quebec, as at least partially evidenced by the government commission mandated to discuss the issue in that province. Even so, four in five in that province suggest they are concerned about abuse. "81 per cent of Quebecers are concerned that legalized euthanasia will lead to the sick, elderly and disabled being euthanized without their consent, up from 73 per cent in 2009," the poll reads.

Finally, if the debate is between good palliative care or legalized euthanasia, Canadians are clear where they stand. The poll shows that Canadians overwhelmingly prefer the former, saying government should “invest in more and better palliative and hospice care (71 per cent) over legalized euthanasia (19 per cent).”

The results of this poll firstly show that the percentage of Canadians concerned about the negative effect of legalized euthanasia on the sick, those with handicaps and the elderly is growing.

Secondly, the public is overwhelmingly coming alongside those who work in palliative care. Equipping palliative care workers is important so they can help individuals approach death with dignity, peace, and with treatment for pain, whether physical, emotional or spiritual. Those who specialize in working with the dying know that there is a better option at the end of life than ending someone’s life by lethal injection.

Euthanasia, after all, is the act of artificially speeding up death through the administration of a killing substance. In the Netherlands, 550 individuals died this way without their consent in 2005, the most recent numbers. [2]

Palliative care, on the other hand, doesn’t endanger the elderly, the sick or those with disabilities. Instead, at the end of life, palliative care affirms the dying person and walks with them to a comfortable, natural death.

Euthanasia is not part of palliative care. The two, properly understood, are in fact opposed. Given this, groups like Life Canada and the Euthanasia Prevention Coalition must continue to educate on this point. Education is working, a hopeful sign for Canada’s future.

## Endnotes

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[1] Life Canada. (2010, October). Canadians' attitudes towards euthanasia, Environics Research Group. For more information, check [www.lifecanada.org](http://www.lifecanada.org)

[2] van der Heide, A., *et al.* (2007). End-of-life practices in the Netherlands under the Euthanasia Act. *The New England Journal of Medicine*, vol. 356, pp. 1957-1965.