

# Ten facts you may not know about euthanasia and assisted suicide around the world

- 1.** 107 of the World Medical Association's 109 constituent National Medical Associations oppose euthanasia and assisted suicide.
- 2.** In 2016 and 2017 in Belgium:
  - 3 children;
  - 77 people suffering from mental health issues; and
  - 173 people with no physical suffering but afflicted by conditions such as addiction, loneliness and despair were euthanised.<sup>3</sup>
- 3.** Since the legalisation of assisted suicide in Oregon 20 years ago, the top five reasons given by those who request (and are given) assisted suicide drugs have been:
  - Losing autonomy
  - Less ability to engage in activities making life enjoyable
  - Loss of dignity
  - Losing control of bodily functions
  - Burden on family, friends and caregivers.

These are the same top five reasons given by those in Washington State who request assisted suicide.<sup>4</sup> Notably, pain or fear of it does not appear in the top reasons.<sup>5</sup>

- 4.** In 2017 in Oregon, the median length of the relationship between the patient and the doctor who prescribed the lethal drugs was 10 weeks, and the median length of time between the first request for assisted suicide and patient death was 52 days.<sup>6</sup> This means that the median time between the first encounter between a drug-prescribing doctor and a request for death is less than three weeks, indicating that the doctors signing off on a patient's death do not have an existing relationship with the patient.

**3** [https://organesdeconcertation.sante.belgique.be/sites/default/files/documents/8\\_rapport-euthanasie\\_2016-2017-fr.pdf](https://organesdeconcertation.sante.belgique.be/sites/default/files/documents/8_rapport-euthanasie_2016-2017-fr.pdf)

**4** Washington State Department of Health, Center for Health Statistics, 2018 Death With Dignity Act Report, <https://www.doh.wa.gov/Portals/1/Documents/Pubs/422-109-DeathWithDignityAct2018.pdf>

**5** Oregon Public Health Division, Oregon Death With Dignity Act: Data Summary 2017 <https://www.oregon.gov/oha/PH/PROVIDERPARTNERRESOURCES/EVALUATIONRESEARCH/DEATHWITHDIGNITYACT/Documents/year20.pdf>

**6** Ibid



5. Only 4.9% of those who have been given assisted suicide drugs in Oregon were sent for a psychiatric evaluation beforehand<sup>7</sup> and only 6% of psychiatrists in Oregon reported being very confident that they could adequately determine whether a psychiatric disorder was impairing the judgment of a patient requesting assisted suicide in a single evaluation.<sup>8</sup>
6. The legalisation of assisted suicide has a contagion effect, increasing the rate of suicide in the community.<sup>9</sup> The suicide rate in Oregon, where assisted suicide was legalised in 1997, has been increasing. In 2012, Oregon's suicide rate was 42% higher than the national average.<sup>10</sup> This does not include deaths by assisted suicide, as they are recorded as being deaths due to the underlying condition.
7. Despite only being legal for four years in Canada, the practice of euthanasia is widespread. Since legalisation, 13,946 people in total have been euthanised.<sup>11</sup>
8. In the first two years of legalised euthanasia in Quebec, 62 deaths (5.6% of all euthanasia deaths) were deemed by the Commission on End of Life Care to have been of abuse by the doctor who prescribed and administered the lethal injection, but the Commission did not recommend any for prosecution.<sup>12</sup>
9. On her visit to Canada, the UN Special Rapporteur on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities reported concerns about the implication of legalised euthanasia from a disability perspective, after receiving "worrisome claims about persons with disabilities in institutions being pressured to seek medical assistance in dying."<sup>13</sup>
10. In the United States, in states where assisted suicide is legal, insurance companies have refused to cover chemotherapy treatment for cancer patients, instead offering the insured assisted suicide drugs.<sup>14</sup>

7 Oregon Health Authority. Oregon Death with Dignity Act: 2017 data summary. 2018. [May 7, 2018]. <http://www.oregon.gov/oha/ph/providerpartnerresources/evaluationresearch/deathwithdignityact/pages/ar-index.aspx>

8 Ganzini L. et al., "Attitudes of Oregon psychiatrists towards physician-assisted suicide", *American Journal of Psychiatry* 1996: 153:1469-75. Retrieved: <http://ajp.psychiatryonline.org/doi/abs/10.1176/ajp.153.11.1469>

9 Jones and Paton, "How Does Legalisation of Physician-Assisted Suicide Affect Rates of Suicide?" *Southern Medical Journal* Volume 108, No. 10 October 2015, accessed here: <https://pdfs.semanticscholar.org/6df3/55333ceec41b361da6dc996d90a17b96e9c.pdf>

10 <https://www.oregon.gov/oha/PH/DISEASESCONDITIONS/INJURYFATALITYDATA/Documents/NVDRS/Suicide%20in%20Oregon%202015%20report.pdf>

11 <https://www.canada.ca/content/dam/hc-sc/documents/services/medical-assistance-dying-annual-report-2019/maid-annual-report-eng.pdf>

12 <https://www.mercatornet.com/careful/view/two-years-of-euthanasia-in-quebec-the-facts/20831>

13 End of Mission Statement by the United Nations Special Rapporteur on the rights of persons with disabilities, Ms. Catalina Devandas-Aguilar, on her visit to Canada, [https://www.ohchr.org/EN/NewsEvents/Pages/DisplayNews.aspx?NewsID:24481&LangID:E&fbclid=IwAR3Vclyvm1\\_XM\\_4acVyh03C20-4zpFpQNg1XE7Ps0j-MJbCC04zW1gqY0dc](https://www.ohchr.org/EN/NewsEvents/Pages/DisplayNews.aspx?NewsID:24481&LangID:E&fbclid=IwAR3Vclyvm1_XM_4acVyh03C20-4zpFpQNg1XE7Ps0j-MJbCC04zW1gqY0dc)

14 Stephanie Packer in California was denied chemotherapy treatment by her health insurance company but offered to pay for assisted suicide <https://www.washingtontimes.com/news/2016/oct/20/assisted-suicidelaw-prompts-insurance-company-den/> See also case of Barbara Wagner in Oregon - denied health cover but offered assisted dying <http://abcnews.go.com/Health/story?id=5517492&page=1>

