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Physician-assisted dying survey

We held a member survey which will help to inform our future policy debates.

 Location: UK  Audience: All doctors  Updated: Wednesday 18 August 2021

BMA physician-assisted dying survey results published

In February we ran one of the biggest surveys of medical opinion on this issue that has ever been undertaken, and the results inform an important debate.

[> Read the blog](#)

In February 2020, we carried out a survey of our members on physician-assisted dying for the first time. This was conducted by Kantar, an independent research organisation, on our behalf.

The BMA is [currently opposed to all forms of physician-assisted dying](#).

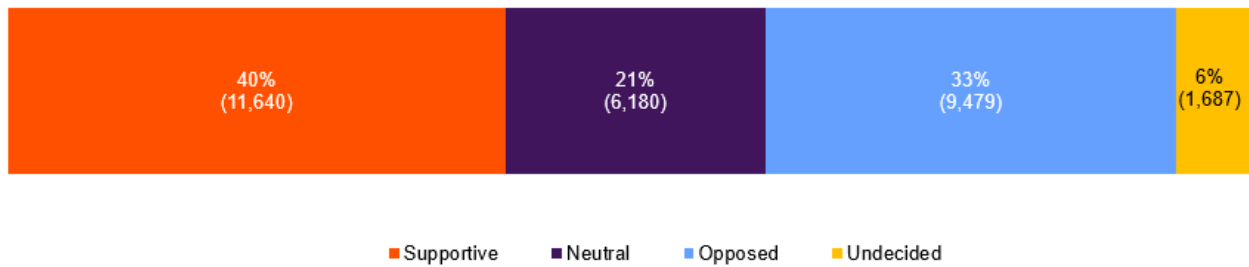
We are presenting the [full results of the survey](#). We will not be providing any interpretation of these findings. We hope that these data will help to inform debate on this topic within the medical profession and beyond.

Key results

Prescribing drugs for self-administration

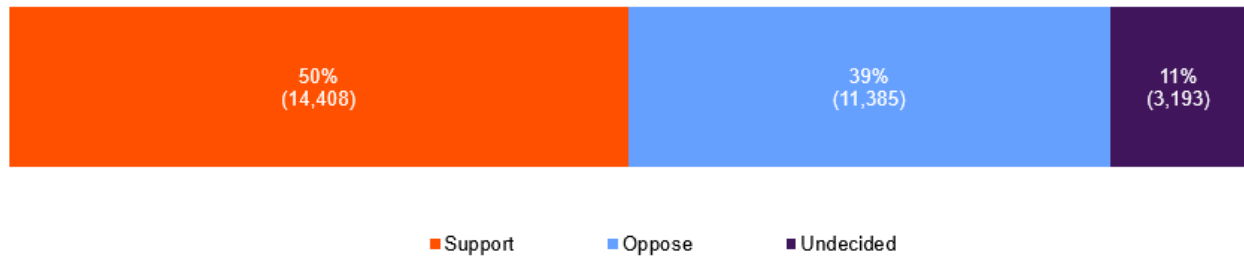
The first section of the survey sought views on a change in the law to permit doctors to prescribe drugs for eligible patients to self-administer to end their own life.

What should the BMA's position be on a change in the law on prescribing drugs for eligible patients to self-administer to end their own life?



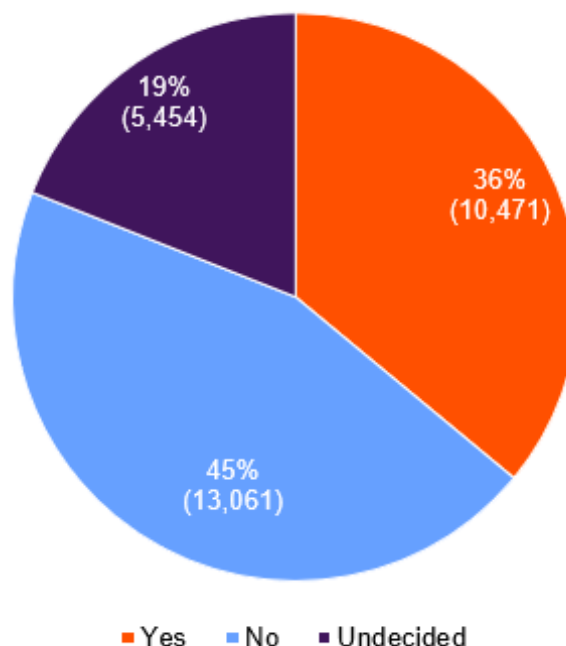
Source: Kantar - 40% supportive, 33% opposed, 21% neutral, 6% undecided

Do you personally support or oppose a change in the law on prescribing drugs for eligible patients to self-administer to end their own life?



Source: Kantar - 50% support, 39% oppose, 11% undecided

Would you be willing to participate in any way in the process if the law changed on prescribing drugs for eligible patients to self-administer to end their own life?

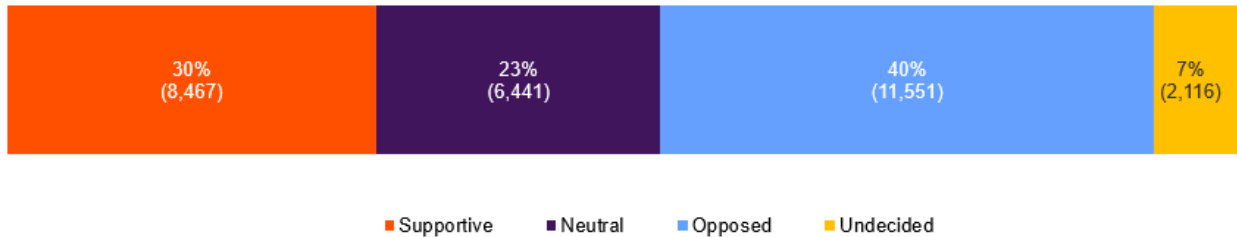


Administering drugs

Source: Kantar - 45% no, 36% yes, 19% undecided

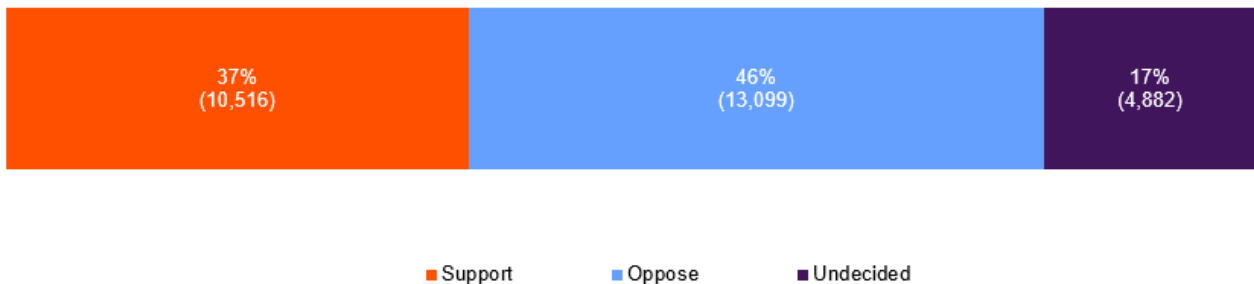
The second section of the survey asked the same questions but in relation to a change in the law to permit doctors to administer drugs with the intention of ending an eligible patient's life.

What should the BMA's position be on a change in the law on doctors administering drugs with the intention of ending an eligible patient's life?



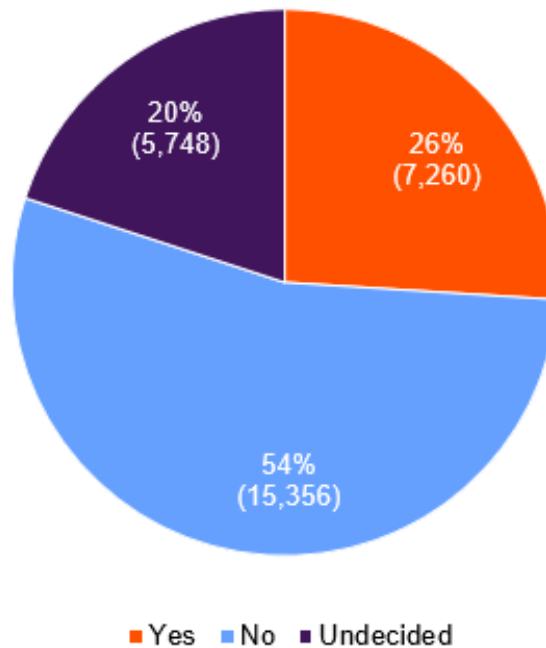
Source: Kantar - 40% opposed, 30% supportive, 23% neutral, 7% undecided

Do you personally support or oppose a change in the law on doctors administering drugs with the intention of ending an eligible patient's life?



Source: Kantar - 46% oppose, 37% support, 17% undecided

Would you be willing to participate in any way in the process if the law changed on doctors administering drugs with the intention of ending an eligible patient's life?



Source: Kantar - 54% no, 26% yes, 20% undecided

[Download full results](#)



Trends in the results

- Members in Northern Ireland were generally more opposed than those in the other nations (no significant differences were found between members in England, Scotland and Wales).
- Members who are registered with a licence to practise in the UK were more opposed than those without a licence to practise.
- Overall, medical students were generally more supportive, and GPs generally more opposed, than most other branches of practice.
- These specialties tended to be generally more supportive: anaesthetics, emergency medicine, intensive care and obstetrics & gynaecology.
- These specialties tended to be generally more opposed: clinical oncology, general practice, geriatric medicine and palliative care.

About the survey response

- We heard from 28,986 members – 19.35% of all members who received an invitation to participate.
- This is higher than other surveys we have carried out of our full membership and higher than or in line with the typical market research response rate for this type of survey.
- This is one of the largest surveys of medical opinion ever carried out on this issue.
- This sample was broadly representative of our membership when assessed by nation, branch of practice and specialty with a few exceptions: GPs were slightly over-represented and junior doctors and medical students were slightly under-represented.
- In total we received 42,607 free text answers, each of which was read and analysed by the specialist team at Kantar.
- There were two 'other, specify' questions to which 2,368 responses were received.
- Any points that were raised by at least 5% of those providing free text answers to these questions are included in the report.

Why we did the survey

In June 2019, our RB (representative body) called on the BMA to “carry out a poll of members to ascertain their views on whether the BMA should adopt a neutral position with respect to a change in the law on assisted dying”.

It was intended to:

- give us a snapshot of our members' views
- enable the RB to understand the views of our wider membership and the reasons for them more broadly
- help to inform a future policy debate.

In addition to informing our policy debate, the additional information provided through the survey will put us in a stronger position to engage on behalf of our members in the event of any future proposals for legislative change.

This debate was originally planned for June 2020 but, due to the COVID-19 pandemic, was delayed, to ensure there is time for a considered, in-depth debate.

In order not to detract from the immediate, pandemic-related issues that were debated at the 2020 virtual ARM in September, it was decided to delay publication of the survey's results until after that meeting had taken place.

Learn more about physician-assisted dying

What is physician-assisted dying?



The law in the UK



Physician-assisted dying briefing pack



You might also be interested in

End-of-life care and physician-assisted dying project

In 2015, we undertook a major project seeking views from our members and the public on their experiences, views, and perceptions of end-of-life care and physician-assisted dying.

13 August 2021