

## Church attender attitudes to euthanasia

### Opposition and support

Euthanasia is currently illegal in Australia, but will become legal in Victoria in mid-2019 when new laws come into effect.

Religious groups have frequently weighed in on the euthanasia debate. Conservative churches have voiced their opposition to decriminalising euthanasia, claiming the right to give and take life belongs to God alone. Other Christian groups, such as Christians Supporting Choice for Voluntary Euthanasia, support euthanasia as providing compassionate, dignified death for the terminally ill. The Australian population largely supports voluntary euthanasia, with a strong majority in support.<sup>1</sup> How does this compare to the opinions of church attenders?

In late 2016 as a part of the 2016 National Church Life Survey, a sample of Catholic, Anglican and Protestant church attenders were asked the following question:

**Do you agree or disagree: 'People suffering from a terminal illness should be able to ask a doctor to end their life'?**

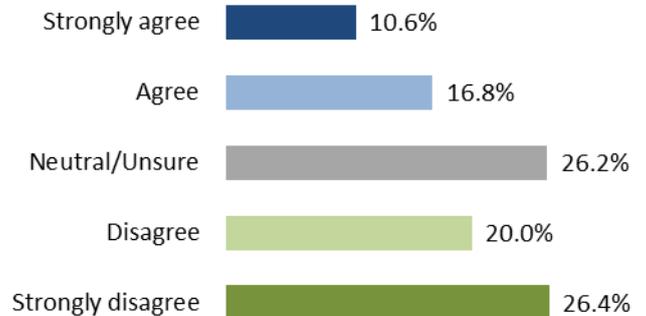
- Strongly agree
- Agree
- Neutral/Unsure
- Disagree
- Strongly disagree

### Overall results

A little under half of church attenders either disagreed (20%) or strongly disagreed (26%) that people suffering from a terminal illness should be able to ask a doctor to end their life (see Figure 1). Only 27% of church attenders showed support for euthanasia. This shows a great departure from national trends. More than a quarter of attenders (26%) indicated they were unsure about this issue, highlighting the complex moral implications of euthanasia.

<sup>1</sup> <https://theconversation.com/factcheck-ganda-do-80-of-australians-and-up-to-70-of-catholics-and-anglicans-support-euthanasia-laws-76079>, accessed 10 October 2018.

Figure 1: Attitudes to euthanasia



Source: 2016 NCLS Attender Sample Survey P (n=1,264).

### Demographics

Overall, age groups didn't differ significantly in their attitudes to euthanasia. The idea that older church attenders may be more sympathetic towards euthanasia, due to them being more susceptible to terminal illness, wasn't supported. There were also no differences by gender.

There were minor differences by level of formal education; 32% of those with a trade qualification strongly disagreed with euthanasia, compared with 25% of attenders whose highest level of education was schooling and 24% of university-qualified attenders.

### Religion

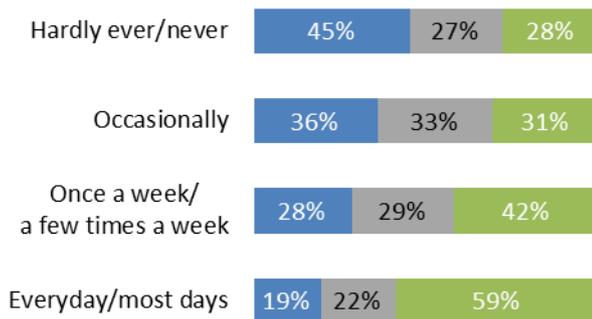
Frequency of private devotions was strongly related to opposition to euthanasia (see Figure 2). The more frequently an attender spent time in private devotion, the more likely they were to disagree or strongly disagree with the terminally ill asking a doctor to end their life (59% of those who practiced devotions everyday or most days, versus 28% of attenders who never or hardly ever spent time in private devotions).

A similar pattern was observed for importance of God and for frequency of church service attendance. Some 57% of attenders for whom God was the most important reality opposed euthanasia, compared with 25% of attenders for whom God was not at all or fairly

important (42% of attenders for whom God was more important than almost anything else). Of those who attended services weekly or more often, 49% disagreed or strongly disagreed with euthanasia. This compares to 30% of those who attended less than weekly.

Catholics and Protestants did not differ significantly in their views.

**Figure 2: Attitudes to euthanasia by frequency of devotional practice**



- Strongly agree/Agree
- Neutral/Unsure
- Disagree/Strongly disagree

Source: 2016 NCLS Attender Sample Survey P (n=1,246)  
Note: Percentages might not add up to 100% due to rounding

## Change over time

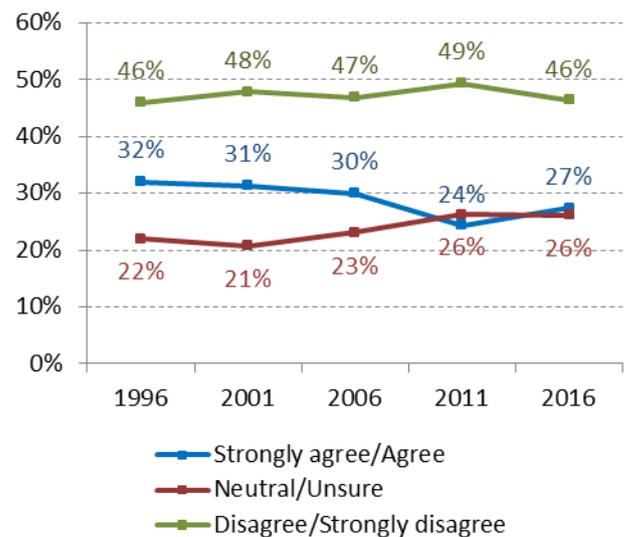
**Table 1: Attitudes to euthanasia 2001-2016**

	2001	2006	2011	2016
	<b>Percentage</b>			
<b>Strongly agree</b>	10	9	9	11
<b>Agree</b>	21	22	15	17
<b>Neutral/unsure</b>	21	23	26	26
<b>Disagree</b>	28	27	26	20
<b>Strongly disagree</b>	20	20	23	26
<b>Total</b>	100	100	100	100

Source: 2001, 2006, 2011 and 2016 NCLSs.  
Note: Percentages might not add up to 100% due to rounding.  
The question wording in 2006 was "People should be able to choose to die if suffering from a terminal illness".

The proportion of church attenders in favour of euthanasia has changed little over 20 years (Table 1, Figure 3). There has been a small decrease in support for euthanasia and a small increase in neutrality or uncertainty. Levels of agreement have remained stable.

**Figure 3: Attitudes to euthanasia, 1996-2016**



Source: 1996, 2001, 2006, 2011 and 2016 NCLSs. 1996 results sourced from "Taking Stock".  
Note: Percentages might not add up to 100% due to rounding.

## Summary

Church attenders are more likely to oppose euthanasia than they are to support it. This differs from the views of the Australian population. Church attender attitudes have changed little over 20 years.

## Data sources

- Castle, K., (2001) [computer file], 2001 NCLS Attender Sample Survey N. Sydney, Australia: NCLS Research.
- Castle, K., (2006) [computer file], 2006 NCLS Attender Sample Survey J. Sydney, Australia: NCLS Research.
- Powell, R., (2014) [computer file], 2011 NCLS Attender Sample Survey O v2. Sydney, Australia: NCLS Research.
- Powell, R., Pepper, M., Hancock, N. and Sterland, S. (2016) [computer file], 2016 NCLS Attender Survey P. Sydney: NCLS Research.

## Citation

Pepper, M., Hancock, N., & Powell, R. (2018) Church attender attitudes to euthanasia, NCLS Research Fact Sheet 18008. Sydney: NCLS Research.

<sup>2</sup> Kaldor, P., Dixon, R., Powell, R., Bellamy, J., Hughes, B., Moore, S. and Dalziel, J. (1999) *Taking Stock: A Profile of Australian Church Attenders*. Adelaide: Openbook, pp.103-105.