

The Final Chapter

Californians' Attitudes & Experiences with Death & Dying

A large majority of Californians say they would prefer a natural death if they became severely ill, rather than have all possible care provided. They would prefer to die at home instead of a hospital or nursing home, and they want to talk with their doctor about

their wishes for care at the end of their lives. However, as a recent survey shows, Californians don't always get what they want. The following are some results of a 2011 survey of 1,669 adult Californians, including 393 who had lost a loved one in the past 12 months.

- Californians say the most important factors at the end of their life are making sure their family is not burdened financially by the costs of care (67% say this is extremely important) and being comfortable and without pain (66%).
- Two-thirds of Californians say they would prefer a natural death if they were severely ill. Only 7% say they would want everything done to prolong life.
- Sixty percent say that making sure their family is not burdened by tough decisions about their care is "extremely important." However, 56% of Californians have not communicated their end-of-life wishes to the loved one they would want making decisions on their behalf.
- While a large majority of Californians (82%) say it is important to have end-of-life wishes in writing, only 23% say they have done so.
- Seventy percent of Californians say they would prefer to die at home. However, in 2009, 32% of deaths in California occurred at home, 42% in a hospital, and 18% in a nursing home.
- Almost 80% say they definitely or probably would like to talk with a doctor about end-of-life wishes, but only 7% have had a doctor speak with them about it.
- Over 80% think it would be a very or somewhat good idea for doctors to be paid for conversations about end-of-life care.
- Top concerns vary by race and ethnicity. For example, Latinos rate living as long as possible (56%) more highly than do other groups.
- Lack of insurance and language barriers strongly influence Californians' perceptions about whether a recently deceased loved one received excellent or very good care.

The Final Chapter was developed by the California HealthCare Foundation in collaboration with the Coalition for Compassionate Care of California and Lake Research Partners. To view the entire report, visit www.chcf.org.

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