

New AMA Position on Medical Aid in Dying

From 2016-2019, the American Medical Association (AMA) Council on Ethical and Judicial Affairs (CEJA) spent three years reviewing the AMA's historical opposition to the practice of medical aid in dying. It is a compassionate end-of-life care option for mentally capable, terminally ill adults authorized in ten jurisdictions across the country including Oregon, Washington, Vermont, California, Colorado, Hawai'i, New Jersey, Maine, the District of Columbia, and Montana (as affirmed by its state Supreme Court).

On June 11, 2019, a new policy position recommended by the Council ([CEJA 2-A-19 Report](#)) was adopted. *For the first time, the AMA affirmed that physicians can provide medical aid in dying "according to the dictates of their conscience without violating their professional obligations."*

Striking a balance, the AMA highlighted two separate provisions of the Medical Code of Ethics as relevant and applicable to medical aid in dying establishing that physicians who participate in medical aid in dying are adhering to their professional, ethical obligations as are physicians who decline to participate. This position allows for, respects and supports the diverse views of the AMA's membership.

According to the AMA CEJA Report adopted by the AMA House of Delegates, "Guidance in the AMA Code of Medical Ethics encompasses the irreducible moral tension at stake for physicians with respect to participating in assisted suicide. Opinion E-5.7 powerfully

expresses the perspective of those who oppose physician-assisted suicide. Opinion 1.1.7 articulates the thoughtful moral basis for those who support assisted suicide."

In addition, the AMA affirmed that euthanasia, defined as the administration of lethal medication by the physician for the purpose of relieving suffering, is distinct from medical aid in dying.

Medical groups that have endorsed medical aid in dying include the [American College of Legal Medicine](#) and the [American Medical Women's Association](#).

Other prominent national medical associations that have withdrawn opposition to medical aid in dying in favor of neutrality include the [American Academy of Family Physicians](#), [American Academy of Hospice and Palliative Medicine](#) and [American Academy of Neurology](#).

A number of state medical societies have adopted neutral positions on medical aid in dying, including the [California Medical Association](#), [Colorado Medical Society](#), [Connecticut State Medical Society](#), [Maine Medical Association](#), [Maryland State Medical Society](#), [Massachusetts Medical Society](#), Medical Society of the District of Columbia, [Minnesota Medical Association](#), [Nevada State Medical Association](#), [New Mexico Medical Society](#), [Oregon Medical Association](#), and [Vermont Medical Society](#).