

State: 111 terminally ill end lives under new California law

June 27 2017, by Julie Watson

California health officials reported Tuesday that 111 terminally ill people took drugs to end their lives in the first six months after a 2016 law made the option legal in the nation's most populous state.

The data was part of the California Department of Public Health's first [report](#) on the law since it went into effect June 9, 2016.

According to the data generated from forms doctors were required to submit between June 9 and Dec. 31, 2016, a total of 191 [people](#) received life-ending drugs after being diagnosed with having less than six months to live and 111 people took them and died. Another 21 individuals died before taking the drugs. The outcomes of 59 others who received the prescriptions were not reported by their doctors within the six-month period, according to the report.

Of those who died, 87 percent were 60 years old or older, most were white, college educated, receiving hospice or palliative care and had insurance. The [median age](#) was 73, according to the report.

How the new law is used in trend-setting California could provide a window to what would happen if the practice spreads across the U.S. Doctor-assisted deaths are also legal in Colorado, Montana, Vermont, Washington state and Washington D.C.

California officials said caution should be exercised in trying to draw conclusions from the report that is based on only six months of data.

Some see providing the choice to the dying as a logical evolution in a medical care system advanced in helping people live longer but limited in preventing slow, painful deaths.

Critics say they are concerned that the option will lead to hasty decisions, misdiagnoses and waning support for [palliative care](#), in which dying people can be sedated to relieve suffering.

Oregon was the first state to adopt such a law in 1997. It reported 204 people received life-ending prescriptions last year, and of those, 133 people died from ingesting the drugs, including 19 recipients from prior years. Most were older than 65 and had cancer.

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