

# Our Mission. Our Work.

Compassion & Choices is the nation's oldest, largest and most active nonprofit working to improve care, expand options and empower everyone to chart their end-of-life journey. Since 1980, we have united over 450,000 supporters nationwide to become the preeminent leader of the end-of-life options movement.

How we live the final chapter of our lives, and how we die, are among the most deeply personal considerations of our lives. While it's our right to decide how much or how little treatment we want in our final days, our current healthcare system often ignores our wishes. Too often, patients don't have complete information about the benefits and burdens of treatment options, preventing them from making fully informed decisions about their own care.

Compassion & Choices is leading the way in transforming our "one-size-fits-all" healthcare system, which allows too much needless pain and suffering, into one that puts people in charge of their own end-of-life care. We envision a patient-driven system that honors an individual's values, religious views and spiritual beliefs. We are working toward an America that respects everyone's right to make their own end-of-life care decisions, in consultation with doctors and loved ones. We advocate for expanded options to ensure everyone can die peacefully and with dignity.

Compassion & Choices works at all levels of government and healthcare nationwide to transform end-of-life care, with informed, empowered patients leading the way.

## Advancing Medical Aid in Dying

Beginning with Oregon's Death With Dignity Act in 1994, Compassion & Choices has been instrumental in the passage of medical aid-in-dying laws across the nation. These laws allow mentally capable, terminally ill adults the ability to receive medication from their doctor to die peacefully if they choose.



Our goal is for half of the U.S. population to live where medical aid in dying is an open and accessible medical practice by 2023. We will not rest until every American has access to this compassionate option.

## Realizing Equity in End-of-Life Care

Despite advances in patient-directed care, considerable disparities still exist in end-of-life care and planning. As a result of structural factors and systemic barriers, underserved communities are less likely than white people to talk about end-of-life care and planning, have documented their end-of-life wishes or enroll in hospice care. They are also less likely to receive adequate pain management, increasing the risk of terrible suffering during the end of life.

With the partnership of these communities, Compassion & Choices is seeking to reduce disparities in end-of-life planning and care, and ensure all individuals have access to equitable end-of-life care regardless of gender identity, age, sexuality, race, ethnicity, religion, national origin, wealth, marital status or disability.

## Transforming How People With Dementia Die

Today, one in three older adults dies with some form of dementia, and that number is growing. Instead of treating dementia like the terminal illness it is, medical technology may draw out the dying process — often without considering the patient’s preferences. Compassion & Choices is leading the effort to transform how people with dementia die, encouraging people to plan for end-of-life care with dementia before a diagnosis, or at the early stages before thinking and speaking abilities fail.

Creating a clear-cut set of care instructions for each stage of dementia, called a Dementia Healthcare Directive, gives loved ones the ability to make informed decisions on the patient’s behalf, leaving people empowered to live their final years on their own terms.

## Empowering People to Finish Strong

Navigating the healthcare system can be daunting. Considering and discussing our own mortality is difficult for most. But both are crucial to ensuring we live as we wish during the final chapter of our lives and die in as much comfort as possible.

Through our online Plan Your Care Resource Center, we provide tools to finish strong, such as the End of Life Decisions Guide & Toolkit and the Dementia Values & Priorities Tool, to help people communicate clearly with providers, take charge of their healthcare and achieve a peaceful death.

The publication by Compassion & Choices of *Finish Strong: Putting Your Priorities First at Life’s End* provides an invaluable roadmap for navigating the final stage of our lives. We also offer free, confidential telephone consultation with trained experts. This direct support, combined with our broader efforts to change health systems and laws, moves us closer to realizing our overall purpose: to empower everybody to chart their own end-of-life journey.

