



FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE
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Americans Want Option to Hasten Death if Faced with Dementia

Tallahassee, Florida – Final Exit Network (FEN) conducted a nationwide poll¹ with YouGov in January exploring how concerned Americans are about dementia and how they feel about having options for hastening their death rather than endure the loss of selfhood caused by dementia.

Dementia, such as Alzheimer's dementia, is an abnormal, progressive loss of brain function that can destroy a person's ability to remember, solve problems, pay attention, recognize loved ones, and even speak. About 1-in-7 Americans age 71 and older suffer from some form of dementia, and almost a third of individuals 85 and older suffer from Alzheimer's dementia alone.²

"The vast majority of Americans, 86%, think dementia is a serious problem," said Brian Ruder, president of FEN, "and getting that many Americans to agree on something should get the attention of legislators considering current and future death with dignity laws." While the idea of giving still-competent adults with early-stage dementia options for hastening their death rather than endure dementia's fate might be new to many people—31% were neutral or unsure about the idea—many more supported the idea than opposed it for the two options presented in the FEN/YouGov poll.

Over half of respondents, 53%, supported the idea that competent individuals with early-stage dementia should be able to legally stipulate, for their future incompetent selves, that they want food and drink withdrawn and for doctors to keep them comfortable so they can die peacefully. Only 15% opposed the idea. Among those who have watched a family member struggle with dementia, support rises to 59%.

"Respondents were more hesitant about the idea of giving competent individuals diagnosed with early-stage dementia the option to end their life before losing their capacity," noted Mary Ewert, FEN's executive director, "but even so, supporters outnumbered opponents by almost 2-to-1," with 44% supporting the idea and 24% opposing it. Support rises to 50% for those who have had a family member with dementia.

Ewert emphasized that, "safeguards to ensure that an individual's choice is their own, free of coercion, and is repeatedly stated over time are essential components of any such option."

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Final Exit Network is a nonprofit, right to die organization that provides practical end-of-life choice and peace of mind to competent adults faced with intractable medical suffering or a loss of selfhood through dementia. FEN provides education on safe, comfortable methods of self-deliverance and a compassionate presence for those who choose that path. They do not provide physical assistance or the means. FEN's Supplemental Advance Directive for Dementia Care allows competent adults to instruct their future care providers to have food and drink withdrawn after they lose capacity. It can be downloaded from: www.finalexitnetwork.org

¹ Except where noted, figures are from YouGov. Sample size was 1148 adults. Fieldwork took place 11-12 January 2021. The survey was carried out online. The figures are weighted and representative of all US adults (aged 18+).

² Figures in this paragraph are from the Alzheimer's Association's report, *2020 Alzheimer's Disease Facts and Figures*.

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Dementia - On Your Own Terms

US_nat Sample: 11th - 12th January 2021



Total

q1. As you may be aware, many older people suffer from dementia, such as Alzheimer's dementia. Dementia is a serious loss of brain function that impairs a person's ability to remember, speak, solve problems, focus and/or pay attention. Some people with dementia cannot control their emotions, and their personalities may change. How serious, if at all, do you think the issue of dementia is in America?

Unweighted base	1148
Base: All US Adults	1148
Very serious	47%
Somewhat serious	39%
Not very serious	6%
Not at all serious	2%
Don't know	6%

q2. Do you personally know anyone who has, or in the past who had, dementia? Please select all that apply.

Unweighted base	1148
Base: All US Adults	1148
Yes, a member of my immediate family	30%
Yes, a relative outside my immediate family	27%
Yes, a close friend or co-worker	12%
Yes, someone else	21%
No, I don't know anyone that has/had dementia	23%
Not sure	8%

q3. Some people propose that individuals with early-stage dementia, who are still competent, should have access to a peaceful method of ending their life before they become incompetent and lose the ability to care for themselves. How strongly do you support or oppose this proposal?

Unweighted base	1148
Base: All US Adults	1148
Strong support	23%
Somewhat support	21%
Neither support nor oppose	21%
Somewhat oppose	7%
Strongly oppose	17%
Don't know	11%

q4. Some people also propose that individuals with early-stage dementia, who are still competent, should be able to legally stipulate, for their future incompetent selves, that they want food and drink withdrawn and for doctors to keep them comfortable so they can die peacefully. How strongly do you support or oppose this proposal?

Unweighted base	1148
Base: All US Adults	1148
Strong support	30%
Somewhat support	23%
Neither support nor oppose	21%
Somewhat oppose	6%
Strongly oppose	9%
Don't know	11%