POLST
CALIFORNIA

PHYSICIAN ORDERS FOR LIFE SUSTAINING TREATMENT

HONORING PATIENTS' END-OF-LIFE WISHES

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POLST law gives immunity from civil or criminal liability to those who comply in good faith with a patient's POLST requests.

WHAT IS POLST?

POLST, Physician Orders for Life Sustaining Treatment is a physician order that provides a patient with control over their end-of-life medical treatment.

A POLST form specifies the types of medical treatment a patient wishes to receive toward the end of their life.

Communication between a patient and their health care professional is crucial in allowing patients to make informed decisions regarding their end-of-life medical treatment. Having a conversation with a patient regarding their end-of-life medical treatment and completing a POLST form can prevent unwanted or medically ineffective treatment, reducing patient and family suffering, and helping to ensure that a patient's wishes are honored.

POLST does not replace an Advance Health Care Directive. It is recommended that a seriously ill patient have both a signed POLST form and an Advance Health Care Directive.

A POLST form is designed to travel with a patient as they move from one medical care setting to another. As a result, physicians orders travel with the patient from one medical care setting to the next.

Studies have shown that patients that have a POLST form, treatment preferences were respected 98% of the time, this includes unwanted CPR, intubation, intensive care or feeding tubes.

POLST is working to close the gap between what end-of-life treatment patients want and what they receive.

The use of POLST is protected by California law. Under the law health care providers are required to treat patients in accordance with their wishes. POLST is an effective tool to communicate those wishes.

HAVING THE POLST CONVERSATION

Having a conversation with a patient about end-of-life issues is an important, meaningful, and necessary part of medical care.

Typically this type of conversation is held with a physician, however, depending upon the setting, other health care workers such as physicians assistants, nurse practitioners, nurses or social workers may also be part of the conversation to address physical, psychosocial, and spiritual issues that often arise.

Physicians ultimately retain the overall responsibility for the completion and content of the POLST form. Because a POLST form creates a medical order, a physician must sign the POSLT form it order for it to be valid. Once signed by both the physician and the patient, POLST becomes part of a patient's medical record.

A POLST form can be modified or revoked, based on new information or a change in the patients condition or preferences.

POLST provides a framework for guiding the conversation and making it easier to have the conversation, thus making it more likely that a patient will express their wishes.

POLST is more than a form; it is a tool to help ensure that patients are making informed decisions and that those wishes are honored across health care settings.

WHAT INFORMATION IS INCLUDED ON A POLST FORM?

The decisions documented on the POLST form include whether to:

- Attempt cardiopulmonary resuscitation
- Administer antibiotics and IV fluids
- Use intubation and mechanical ventilation
- Provide artificial nutrition

POLST FAQ'S:

Why was POLST developed?

POLST was developed in response to seriously ill patients receiving medical treatments that were not consistent with their wishes. The goal of POLST is to provide a framework for health care professionals so they can provide the treatments patients DO want, and avoid those treatments that they do not want.

Is POLST mandated by law?

Completion of a POLST form is voluntary. However, California law requires that the physician orders in a POLST be followed by health care professionals, and provides immunity from civil or criminal liability to those who comply in good faith with a patients' POLST requests. POLST legislation in California was adopted, as AB3000 and became effective January 1, 2009.

Who should have a POLST form?

A seriously ill patient, or those who are medically frail regardless of their age, should complete a POLST form. Completion of a POLST form is voluntary.

Who should discuss and complete the POLST form with patients?

An end-of-Life discussion with a patient is an important and necessary part of their overall medical care. The law allows anyone who is a health care provider, to assist with the completion of a POLST form. California law defines a health care provider as *an individual licensed, certified, or otherwise authorized or permitted by the State of California to provide health care in the ordinary course of business or practice of a profession.*

WHAT IF THE PATIENT CANNOT COMMUNICATE THEIR WISHES?

If the patient cannot communicate their wishes, a health care professional can complete the POLST form based upon the family members understanding of their loved one's wishes. The appointed decision maker can then sign the POLST form on behalf of their loved ones wishes.

If there is a conflict between a POLST form and an Advance Directive...the most recent document should be honored.

WHAT HAPPENS ONCE A POLST FORM IS COMPLETED?

The original POLST form, on bright pink paper, stays with the patient at all times. If the patient is transferred to another setting, the POSLT form goes with them.

- *In the acute care or long-term care setting, the form should be kept in the patients medical record or file.*
- *At home, patients should place the form in a visible location so it can be easily found by emergency medical personnel , usually on a table near the patient's bed or on the refrigerator.*

CAN A PATIENT'S FORM BE CHANGED?

YES! A patient's POLST form can be modified or revoked by a patient, verbally or in writing, at any time. Changes may also be made by a physician or requested by a patient's decision maker, based on new information or changes in the patients condition.

HAVE YOU HAD THE CONVERSATION

POLST CALIFORNIA

IT'S MORE THAN A FORM.

MORE POLST FAQ'S:

When should a patient's POLST form be reviewed?

It is good clinical practice to review a patient's POLST form when any of the following occur:

- The patient is transferred from one medical or residential setting to another.
- There is a significant change in the person's health status, or there is a new diagnosis.
- The patient's treatment preferences change.

How can I obtain copies of the POLST form to use with patient's?

Healthcare providers may download the California POLST form at www.caPOLST.ORG. In order to maintain continuity throughout California, the form should be copied or printed on 65# Ultra Pink card stock, available at most office supplies stores. POLST forms may be purchased in bulk from MedPass at www.med-pass.com.

Are faxed copies and/or photocopies valid? Must pink paper be used?

Faxed copies and photocopies are valid. Ultra Pink paper is preferred and used to distinguish the form from other forms in the patient's medical record; however, the form will be honored on any color paper.

HAVE YOU HAD THE CONVERSATION

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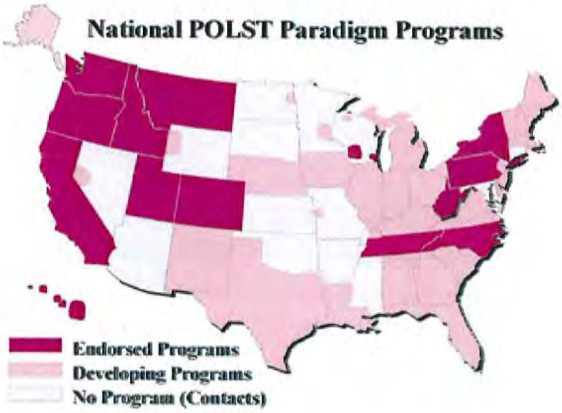
MORE POLST FAQ'S:

Is the POLST form available in other languages?

POLST forms are available on the capolst.org web site in Armenian, Braille, Chinese, Farsi, Hmong, Korean, Pashto, Russian, Tagalog, Vietnamese, and Spanish to help in explaining the form. However, the English version of the POLST form must be completed and signed so that emergency medical personnel and healthcare providers can follow the orders.

Where is POLST being used now?

POLST was originally developed in Oregon. There are a number of states, as identified on the map below, which have established POLST programs or are currently developing programs. For more information on the national POLST effort, including published research and a complete listing of states using POLST, visit www.POLST.org.



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MORE POLST FAQ'S:

Will a patient's POLST form be valid when traveling to another state?

The California POLST form is valid in CALIFORNIA. If patients are traveling outside California, it is a good idea for them to take both their Advance Directive and POLST form with them. Both documents, event if not legally binding, will help healthcare professionals know and honor their wishes.

Which organizations support the use of the POSLT form?

California POSLT is part of a national effort. For a complete list of organizations in California that support the use of the POLST forms, please go to www.capolst.org/membership/php

Who is leading the POSLT initiative in California?

The Coalition for Compassionate Care of California provides leadership and oversight for POLST outreach activities in California, with support from the California HealthCare Foundation.

The following graphs reflect some of the results of a survey conducted by the California Health Care Foundation . The Foundation surveyed over 1,600 Californians regarding their thoughts on their end-of-life care.

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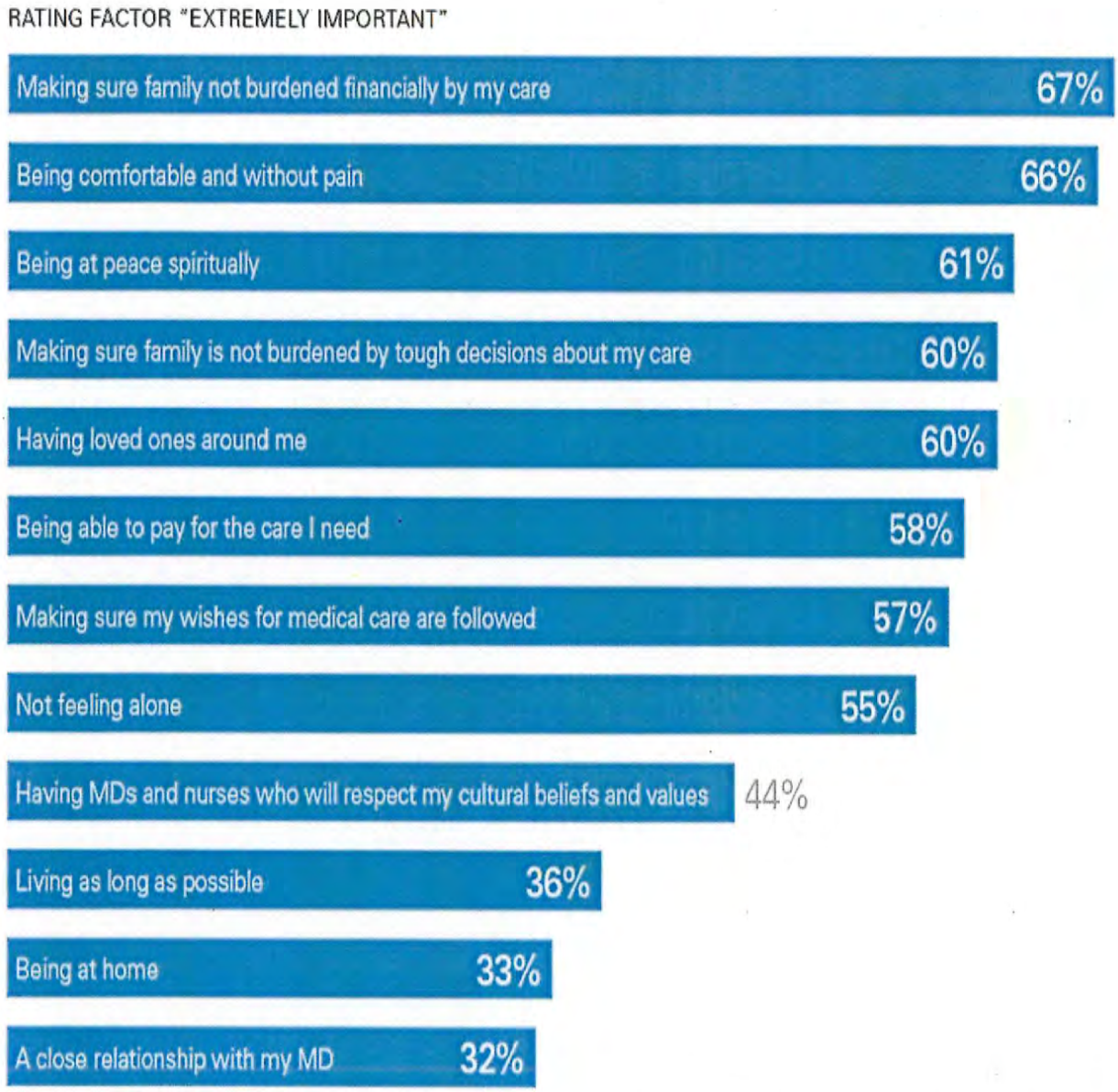
Most Important Factors at End of Life, California, 2011



Source: Californians' Attitudes Toward End-of-Life Issues, Lake Research Partners, 2011. Statewide survey of 1,669 adult Californians, including 393 respondents who have lost a loved one in the past 12 months.

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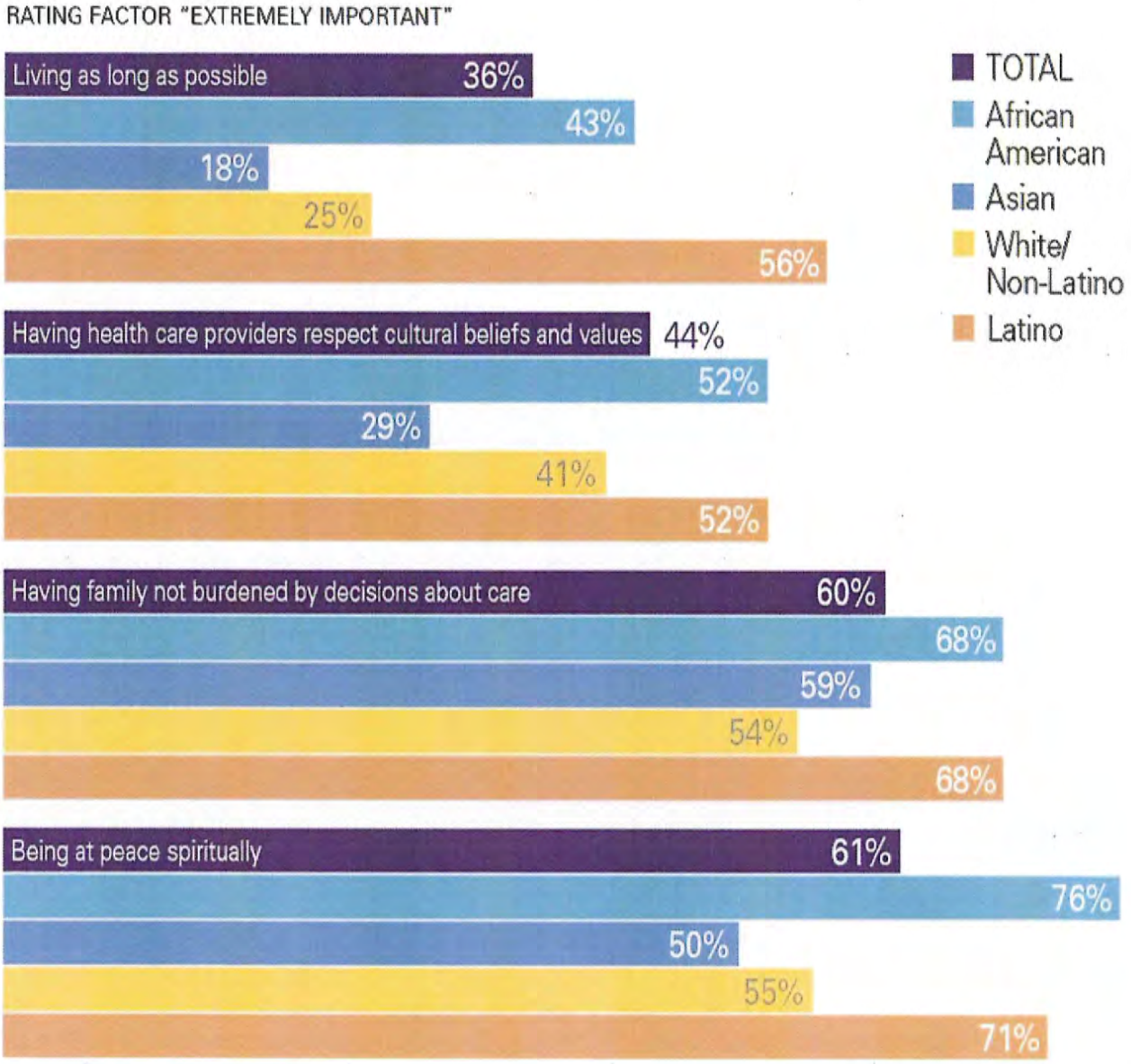
Most Important Factors at End of Life,
by Race/Ethnicity, California, 2011



Source: Californians' Attitudes Toward End-of-Life Issues, Lake Research Partners, 2011. Statewide survey of 1,669 adult Californians, including 393 respondents who have lost a loved one in the past 12 months.

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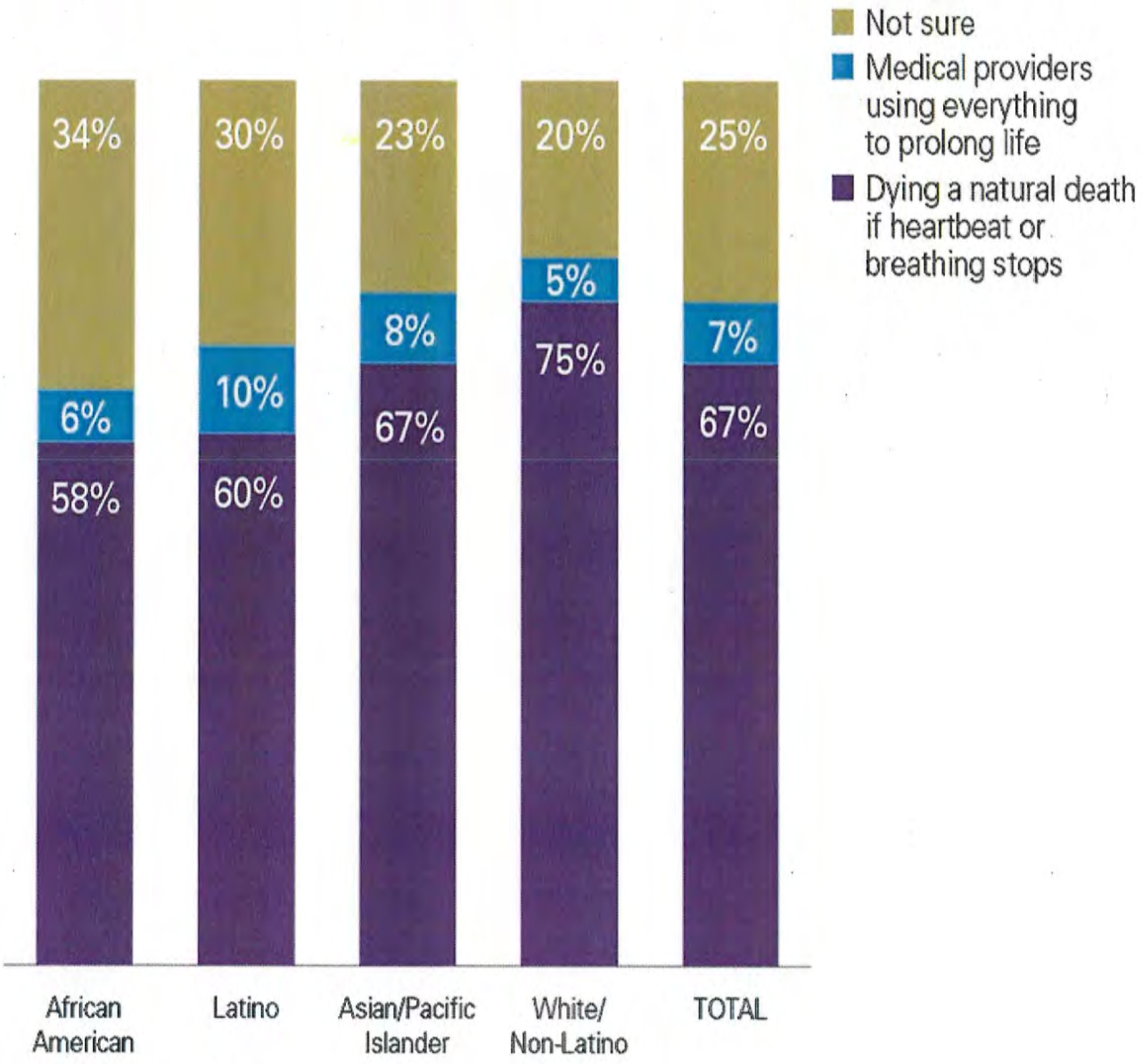
Preferences Around Prolonging Life,
by Race/Ethnicity, California, 2011



Note: Segments may not add to 100% due to rounding.

Source: Californians' Attitudes Toward End-of-Life Issues, Lake Research Partners, 2011. Statewide survey of 1,669 adult Californians, including 393 respondents who have lost a loved one in the past 12 months.

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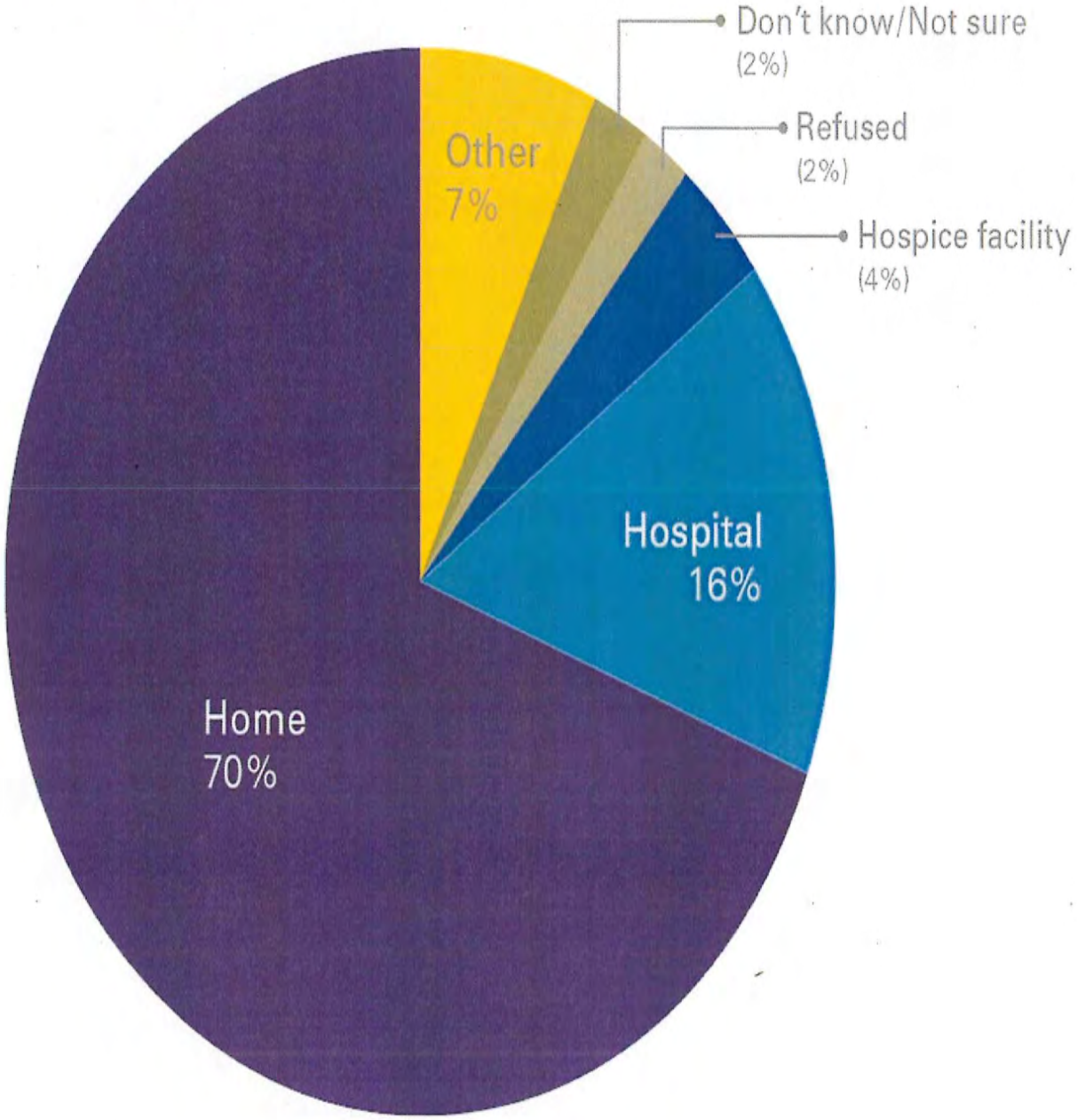
Preferred Location of Death,
California, 2011



Note: Segments may not add to 100% due to rounding.

Source: Californians' Attitudes Toward End-of-Life Issues, Lake Research Partners, 2011. Statewide survey of 1,669 adult Californians, including 393 respondents who have lost a loved one in the past 12 months.

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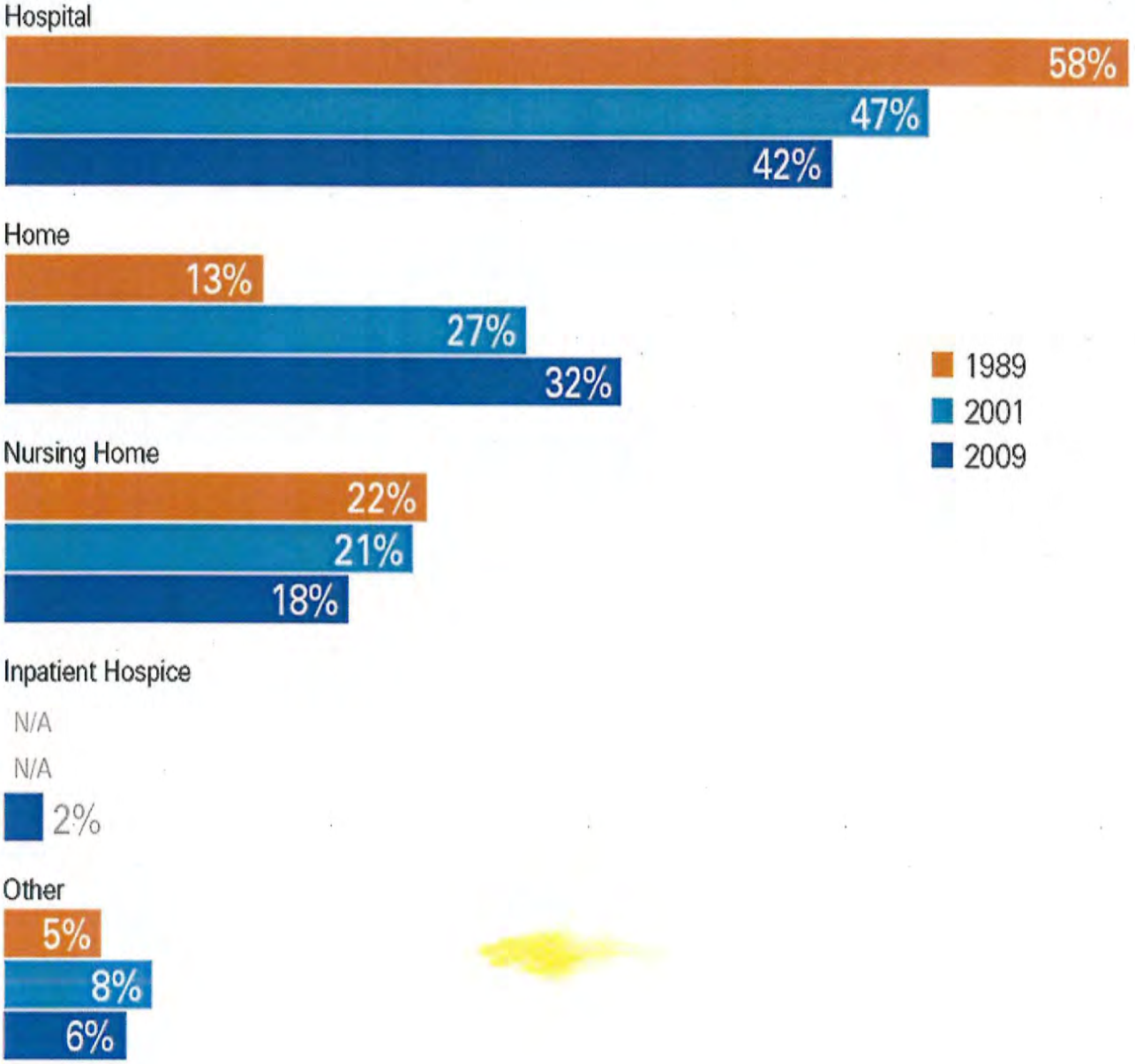
Location of Deaths,
California, 1989, 2001, 2009



Source: State of California, Department of Public Health, Death Records, 2011.

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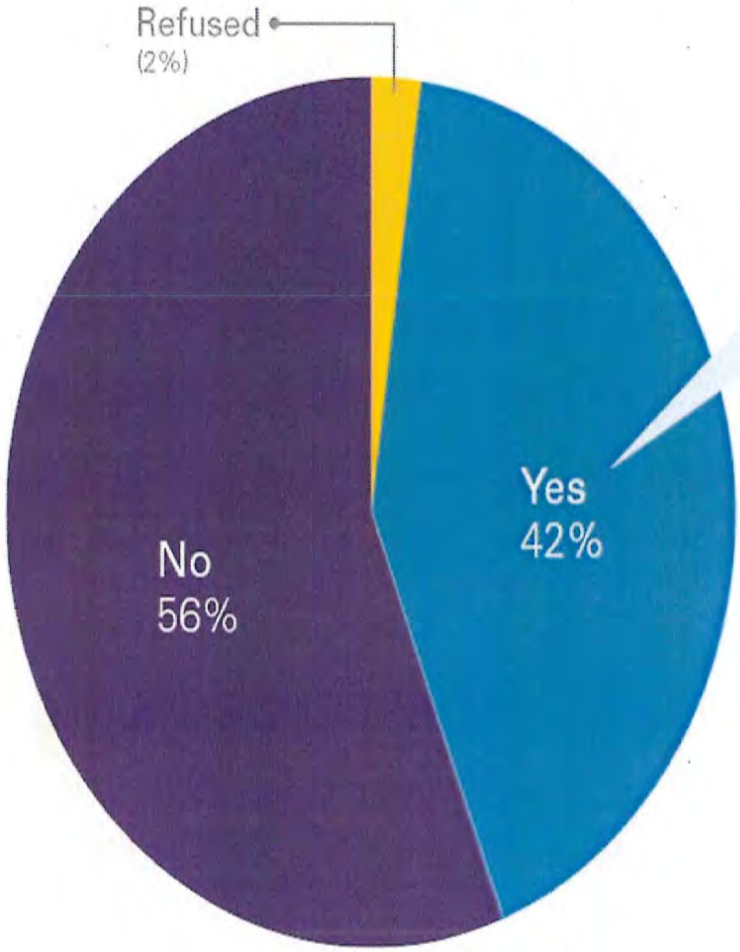
Discussed End-of-Life Wishes with a Loved One, California, 2011

Have you talked with (the loved one you would want to make decisions on your behalf) about the kind of medical treatment you would want?



Most likely to say "yes":

- Age 65+
  (71%)
- White
  (54% vs. 41% African Americans, 31% Latinos, and 33% Asians)
- Some college+
  (46% vs. 36% high school or less)
- Income $50K+
  (49% vs. 36% <$50K)
- Has chronic conditions
  (48% vs. 34%)

Source: Californians' Attitudes Toward End-of-Life Issues, Lake Research Partners, 2011. Statewide survey of 1,669 adult Californians, including 393 respondents who have lost a loved one in the past 12 months.

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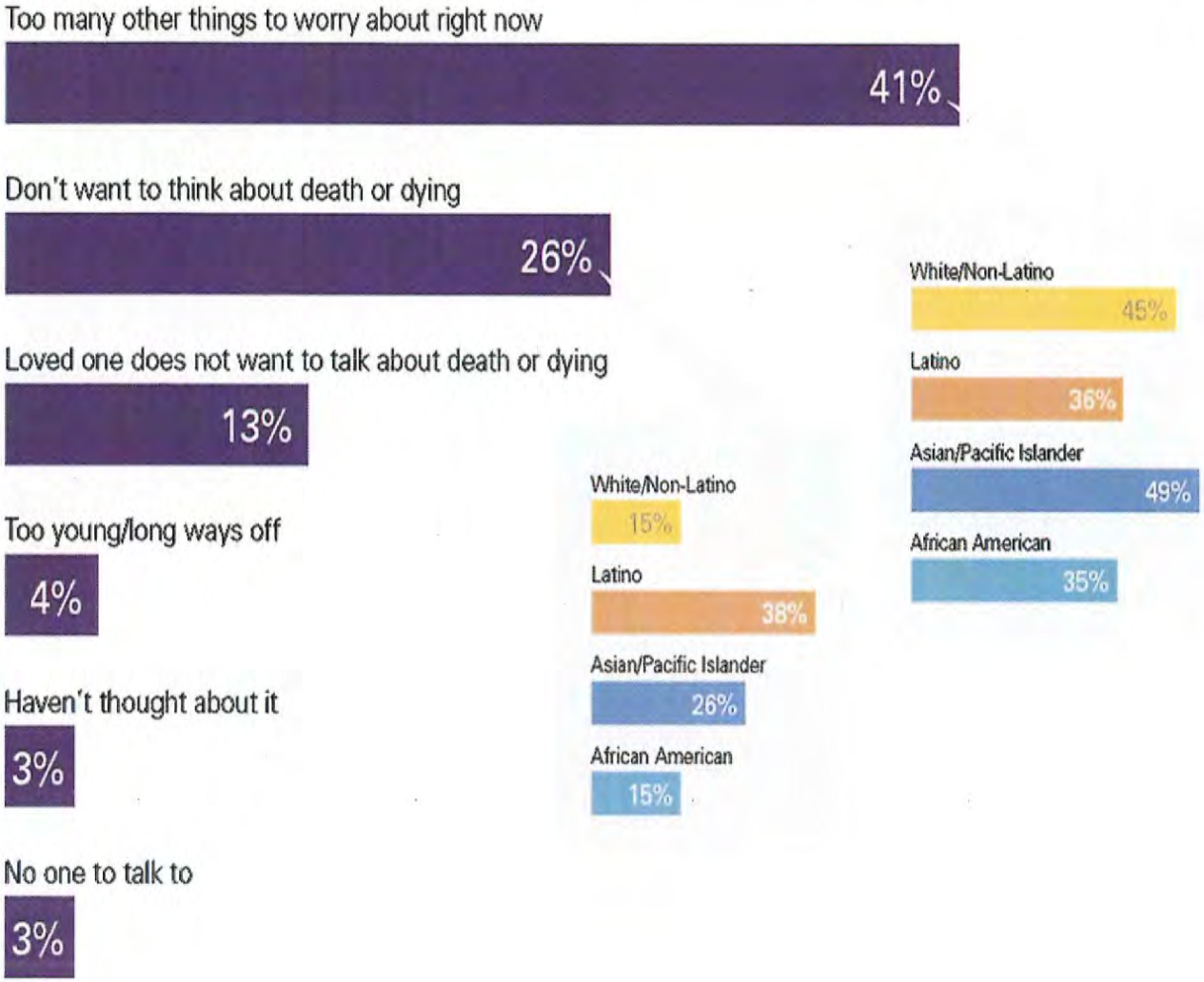
Barriers to Discussing Wishes with Loved One, California, 2011

What is the main reason you have not talked (to your loved one) about your wishes for end-of-life medical treatment?

n = 857



Source: Californians' Attitudes Toward End-of-Life Issues, Lake Research Partners, 2011. Statewide survey of 1,669 adult Californians, including 393 respondents who have lost a loved one in the past 12 months.

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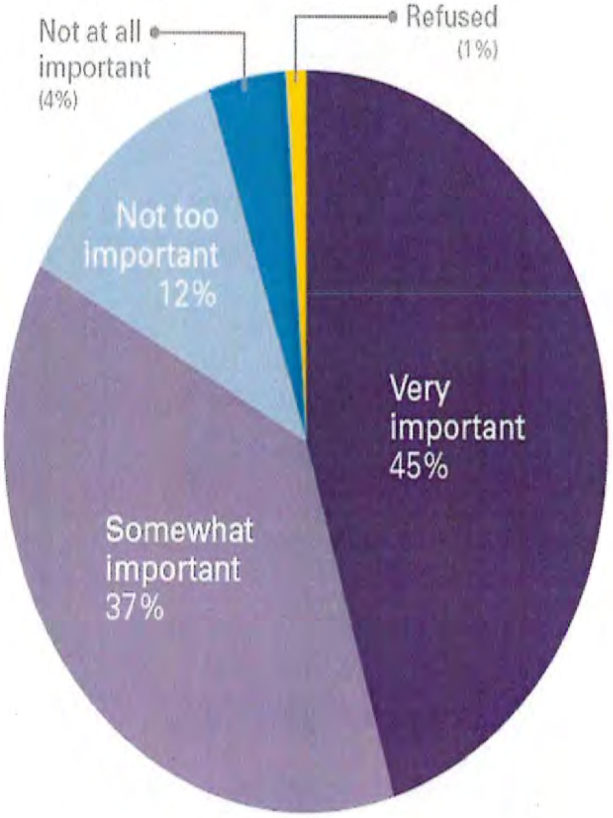
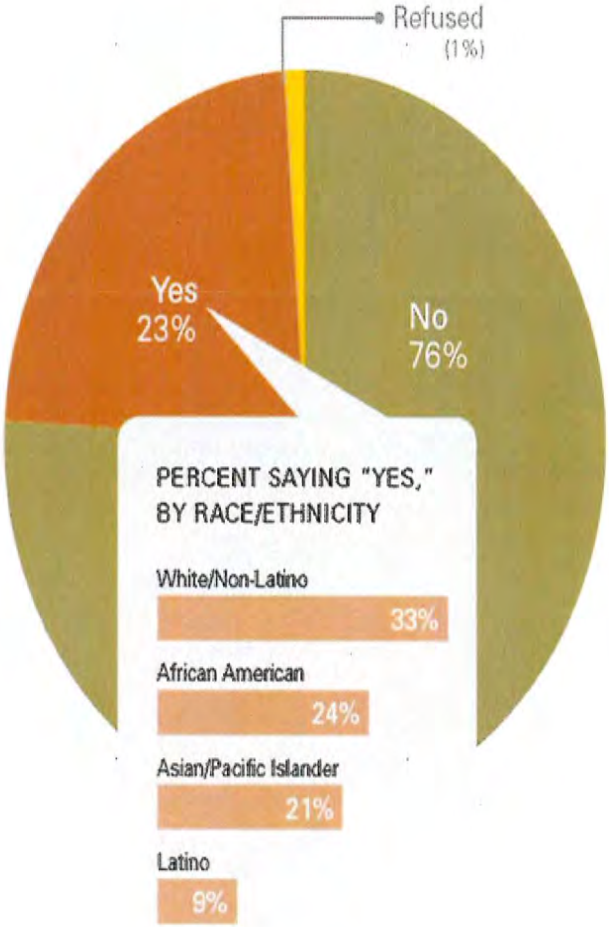
Put End-of-Life Wishes in Writing,
California, 2011

How important do you feel it is to have your wishes in writing?



Do you have any of your wishes regarding the medical treatment you would want in a written document?



Note: Segments may not add to 100% due to rounding.

Source: Californians' Attitudes Toward End-of-Life Issues, Lake Research Partners, 2011. Statewide survey of 1,669 adult Californians, including 393 respondents who have lost a loved one in the past 12 months.

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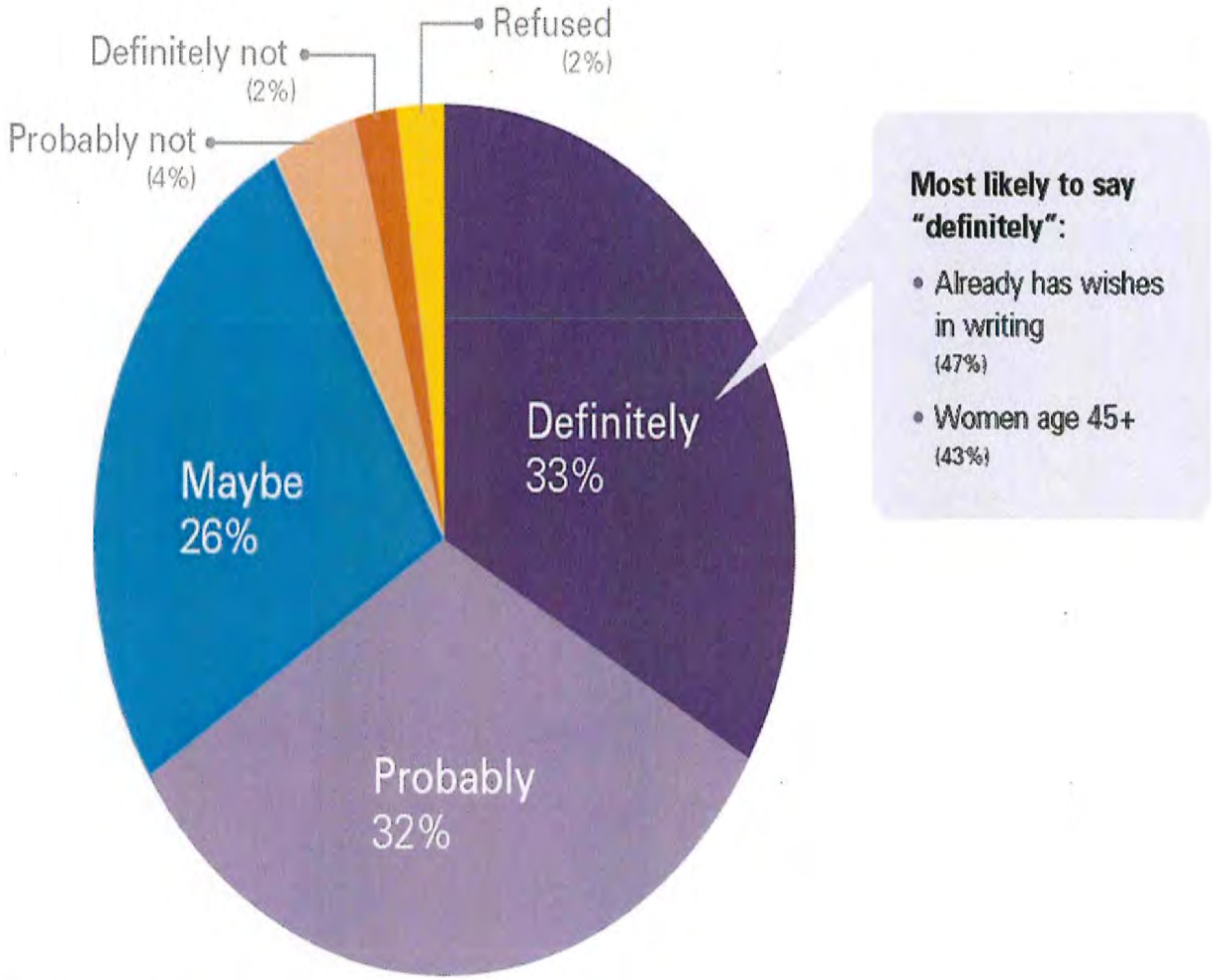
Attitudes Toward POLST for Self,
California, 2011

If you were seriously ill, do you think you would want to fill out a POLST [Physician Orders for Life-Sustaining Treatment] form with your doctor?



Note: Segments may not add to 100% due to rounding.

Source: Californians' Attitudes Toward End-of-Life Issues, Lake Research Partners, 2011. Statewide survey of 1,669 adult Californians, including 393 respondents who have lost a loved one in the past 12 months.

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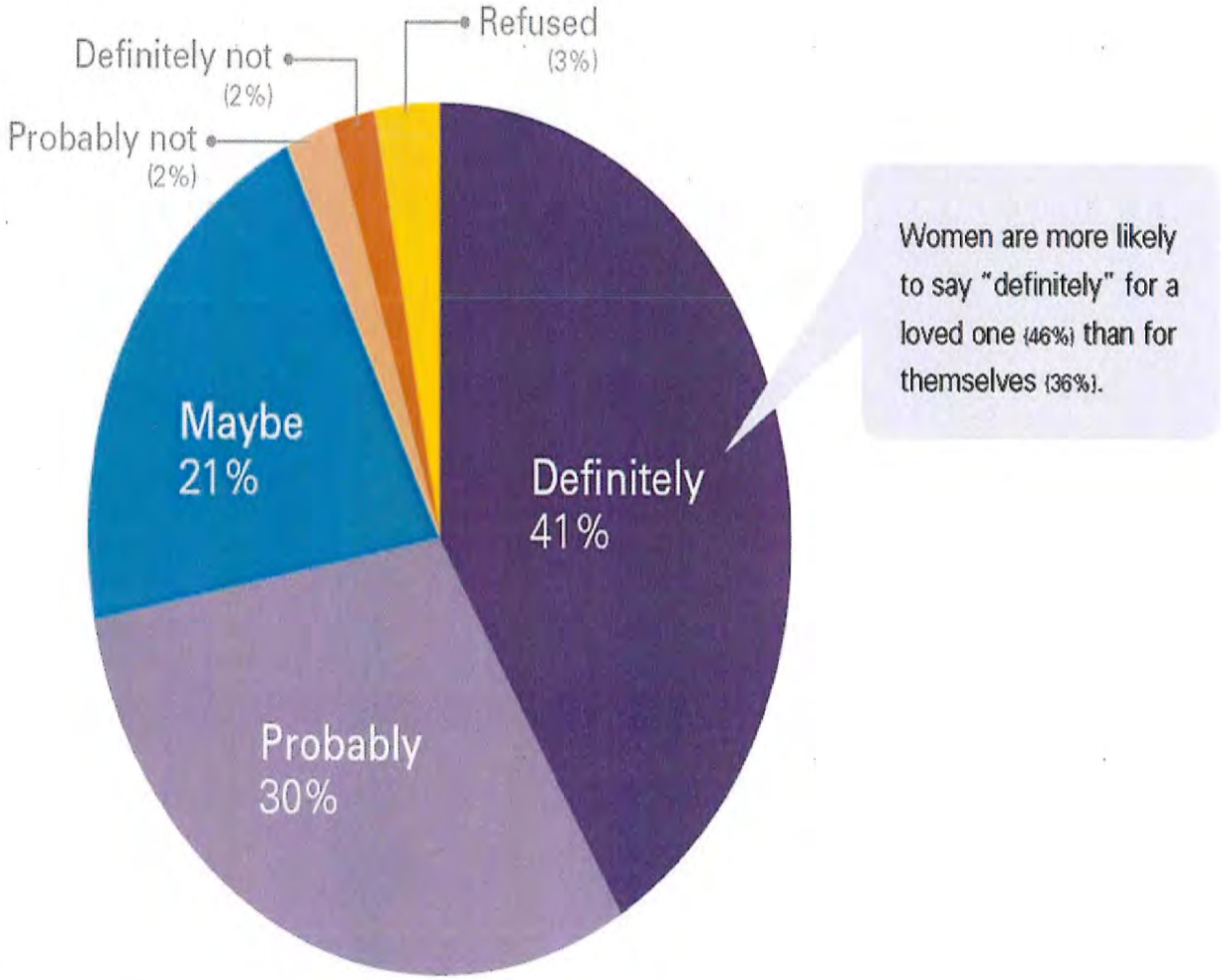
Attitudes Toward POLST for Loved One, California, 2011

If a loved one were seriously ill, would you want them to fill out a POLST form so you would be clear about what he or she wanted?



Note: Segments may not add to 100% due to rounding.

Source: Californians' Attitudes Toward End-of-Life Issues, Lake Research Partners, 2011. Statewide survey of 1,669 adult Californians, including 393 respondents who have lost a loved one in the past 12 months.

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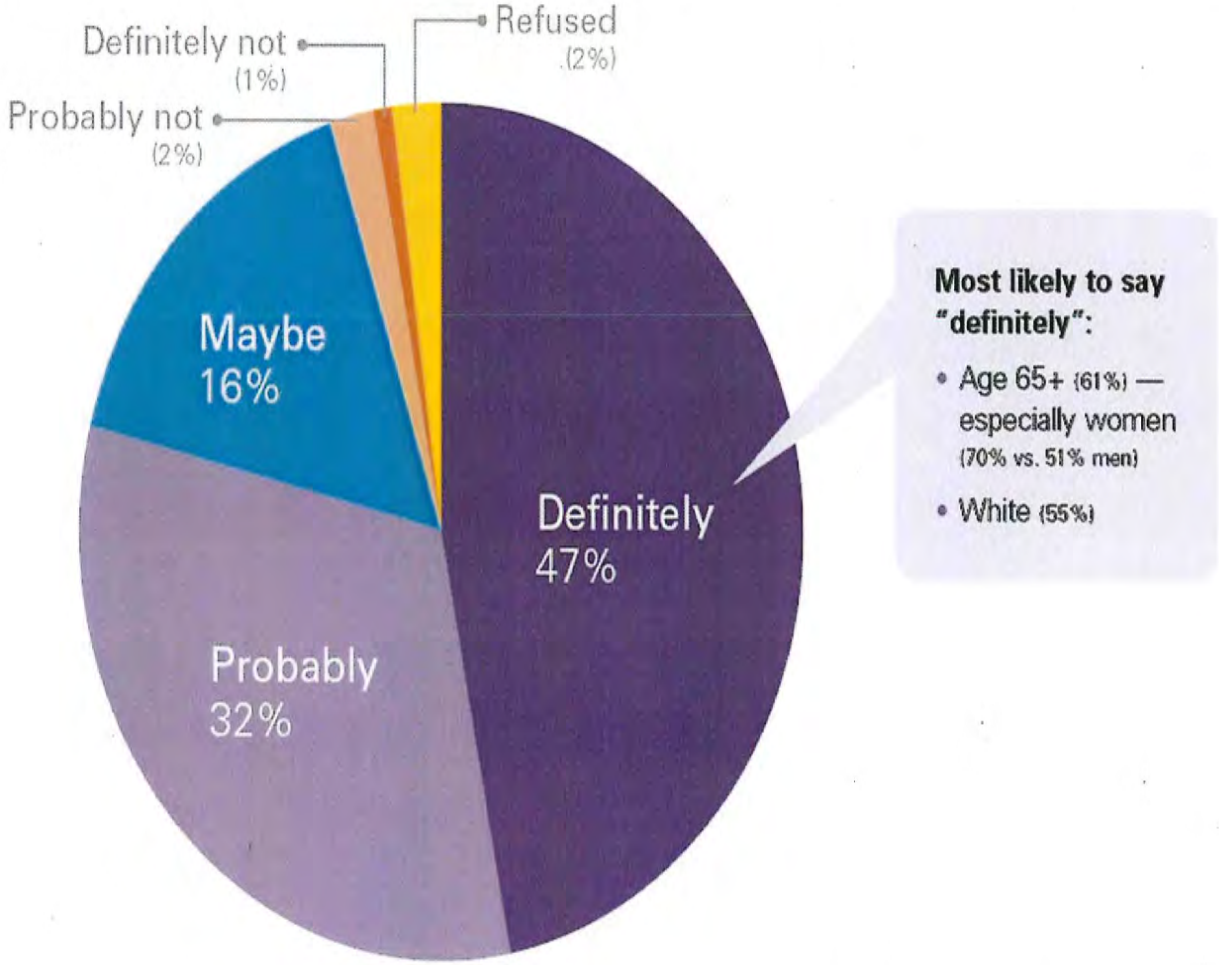
Would Like to Talk to Doctor About End-of-Life Wishes, California, 2011

If you were seriously ill, would you like to talk with your doctor about your wishes for medical treatment toward the end of your life?



Source: Californians' Attitudes Toward End-of-Life Issues, Lake Research Partners, 2011. Statewide survey of 1,669 adult Californians, including 393 respondents who have lost a loved one in the past 12 months.

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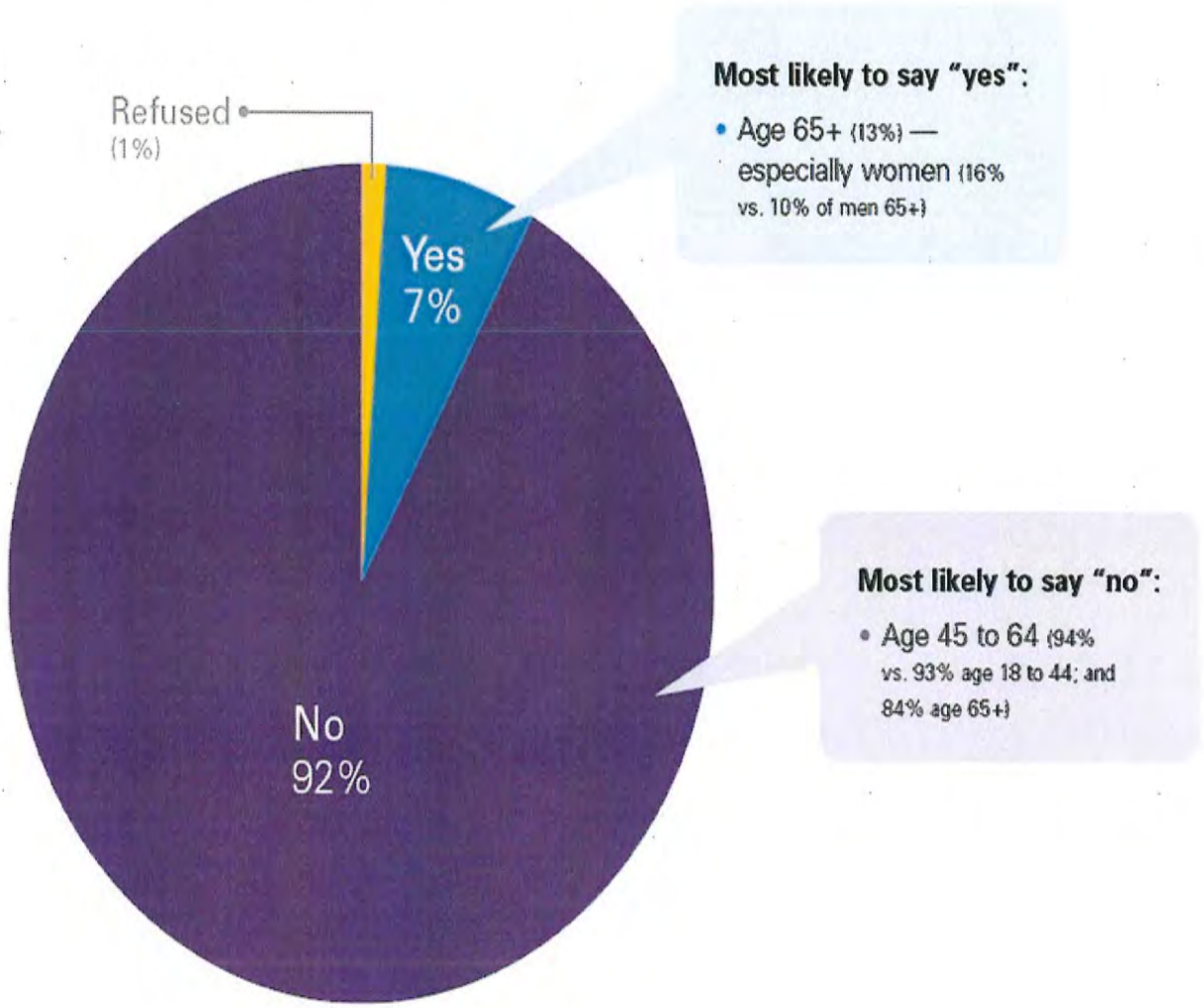
Doctor Talking with Patient About End-of-Life Wishes, California, 2011

Have you ever had a doctor ask you about your wishes for medical treatment at the end of your life?



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FOR MORE INFORMATION LOCALLY:

Community Hospice, Inc.
Stanislaus/San Joaquin
POLST Coalition
4368 Spyres Way
Modesto, CA 95356

209-578-6300

FOR MORE INFORMATION ELSEWHERE ON POLST:

Please find listed below additional resources for more information regarding POLST:

The California Coalition for Compassionate Care: www.capolst.org

The National POLST Group: www.polst.org

Death with Dignity National Center: www.deathwithdignity.org

National Healthcare Decisions Day: www.nhdd.org

Search: POLST at www. youtube.com

HAVE YOU HAD THE CONVERSATION

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PHYSICIAN ORDERS FOR LIFE-SUSTAINING TREATMENT

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