

HEALTH CARE

# Canadians want family members, not doctors, to make life-and-death decisions

*One-in-ten would want to be kept alive if they were in a vegetative state*

[VANCOUVER – Dec. 11, 2007] – Many Canadian adults believe a family member should have the final say on whether a patient in a vegetative state should be removed from life support, a new Angus Reid Strategies poll has found.

In the online survey of a representative national sample, 68 per cent of respondents believe the life-and-death decision must be made by a family member, while 15 per cent believe a doctor should make the call. Only two per cent of respondents would prefer to involve a judge in these matters, and 15 per cent are not sure.

British Columbia (24%) and Atlantic Canada (25%) show the highest support for allowing doctors to make the final decision on whether to remove a patient in a vegetative state from life support. Conversely, more than seven-in-ten respondents in Quebec (79%) and Alberta (73%) believe a family member should make the call.

Most adults in Canada have a clear idea of what they would prefer to experience in the event of a serious accident that could leave them in a vegetative state, but very few have actually articulated those wishes in writing.

In the survey, only 11 per cent of Canadians say they would want to be kept alive if they were in a vegetative state.

However, when Canadians were asked if they have personally communicated—either to their spouse, family, friends or doctor—their wishes in the event of a serious accident that could leave them in a

## KEY FINDINGS

- » **68% think a family member should make the final decision on whether to remove a patient in a vegetative state from life support**
- » **11% would want to be kept alive if they were in a vegetative state**
- » **12% have communicated their wishes in writing in the event of a serious accident that could leave them in a vegetative state**
- » **75% are confident that doctors in Canada can accurately determine when a patient is in a vegetative state**

Full topline results are at the end of this release.

*From December 3 to December 4, 2007, Angus Reid Strategies conducted an online survey among a randomly selected, representative sample of 1,057 adult Canadians. The margin of error for the total sample is +/- 3.1 %, 19 times out of 20. The results have been statistically weighted according to the most current education, age, gender and region Census data to ensure a sample representative of the entire adult population of Canada. Discrepancies in or between totals are due to rounding.*

vegetative state, 39 per cent of respondents acknowledge that they have not discussed the topic. In addition, 49 per cent of respondents have talked about this situation with someone else, but only 12 per cent have outlined their wishes in writing.

The number of respondents who oppose being kept alive if they were in a vegetative state increases with age. Three-in-five (60%) respondents aged 18-34 reject the notion, as well as 71 per cent of those aged 35-54, and 79 per cent of those aged 55+. Older Canadians (21%) and Canadians in households earning more than \$100,000 a year (20%) are more likely to have written instructions on how to proceed in the event of a serious accident.

Earlier this year, doctors at Calgary's Foothills Hospital issued a "do-not-resuscitate" order after patient Zongwu Jin fell into a coma. Jin's family convinced a judge to lift the order, and Jin has since regained consciousness—although resuscitation was neither needed, nor performed. The Calgary Health Region has appealed the judge's decision, claiming it could undermine the authority of physicians to make life-and-death pronouncements without the interference of the courts.

Three-in-four Canadians (75%) are "very confident" or "moderately confident" that doctors in Canada can accurately determine when a patient is in a vegetative state.

#### The role of doctors

Q. Now we'd like to ask you some questions about health care. When a person is described as being in a vegetative state, the brain has lost its higher functions—such as consciousness and self-awareness—but can maintain involuntary functions such as heart rate, blood pressure, breathing and swallowing. How confident are you that doctors in Canada can accurately determine when a patient is in a vegetative state?

	Total	Region						Gender	
		BC	AB	MB/SK	ONT	PQ	ATL	Male	Female
<b>Very confident</b>	<b>27%</b>	<b>24%</b>	<b>24%</b>	<b>22%</b>	<b>27%</b>	<b>31%</b>	<b>26%</b>	<b>33%</b>	<b>23%</b>
<b>Moderately confident</b>	<b>48%</b>	<b>53%</b>	<b>48%</b>	<b>44%</b>	<b>42%</b>	<b>50%</b>	<b>60%</b>	<b>45%</b>	<b>50%</b>
<b>Not too confident</b>	<b>17%</b>	<b>15%</b>	<b>19%</b>	<b>28%</b>	<b>18%</b>	<b>13%</b>	<b>10%</b>	<b>15%</b>	<b>18%</b>
<b>Not confident at all</b>	<b>6%</b>	<b>7%</b>	<b>4%</b>	<b>4%</b>	<b>8%</b>	<b>5%</b>	<b>2%</b>	<b>4%</b>	<b>7%</b>
<b>Not sure</b>	<b>3%</b>	<b>1%</b>	<b>5%</b>	<b>2%</b>	<b>5%</b>	<b>1%</b>	<b>2%</b>	<b>3%</b>	<b>3%</b>

#### The role of doctors

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	Total	Age			Income		
		18-34	35-54	55+	<\$50K	\$50-99K	\$100K +
<b>Very confident</b>	<b>27%</b>	<b>25%</b>	<b>27%</b>	<b>30%</b>	<b>27%</b>	<b>24%</b>	<b>25%</b>
<b>Moderately confident</b>	<b>48%</b>	<b>49%</b>	<b>48%</b>	<b>46%</b>	<b>43%</b>	<b>52%</b>	<b>49%</b>
<b>Not too confident</b>	<b>17%</b>	<b>14%</b>	<b>18%</b>	<b>17%</b>	<b>18%</b>	<b>16%</b>	<b>14%</b>
<b>Not confident at all</b>	<b>6%</b>	<b>9%</b>	<b>4%</b>	<b>5%</b>	<b>8%</b>	<b>5%</b>	<b>9%</b>
<b>Not sure</b>	<b>3%</b>	<b>4%</b>	<b>3%</b>	<b>2%</b>	<b>4%</b>	<b>2%</b>	<b>4%</b>

A person's choice									
Q. If you were in a vegetative state, would you want to be kept alive?									
		Region						Gender	
	Total	BC	AB	MB/SK	ONT	PQ	ATL	Male	Female
<b>Yes</b>	<b>11%</b>	<b>14%</b>	<b>16%</b>	<b>9%</b>	<b>14%</b>	<b>4%</b>	<b>6%</b>	<b>11%</b>	<b>10%</b>
<b>No</b>	<b>69%</b>	<b>68%</b>	<b>67%</b>	<b>66%</b>	<b>62%</b>	<b>81%</b>	<b>72%</b>	<b>69%</b>	<b>69%</b>
<b>Don't know</b>	<b>20%</b>	<b>18%</b>	<b>17%</b>	<b>24%</b>	<b>24%</b>	<b>15%</b>	<b>22%</b>	<b>20%</b>	<b>20%</b>

A person's choice							
Q. If you were in a vegetative state, would you want to be kept alive?							
		Age			Income		
	Total	18-34	35-54	55+	<\$50K	\$50-99K	\$100K +
<b>Support</b>	<b>11%</b>	<b>17%</b>	<b>8%</b>	<b>7%</b>	<b>15%</b>	<b>7%</b>	<b>8%</b>
<b>Oppose</b>	<b>69%</b>	<b>60%</b>	<b>71%</b>	<b>79%</b>	<b>67%</b>	<b>76%</b>	<b>69%</b>
<b>Don't know</b>	<b>20%</b>	<b>23%</b>	<b>21%</b>	<b>14%</b>	<b>18%</b>	<b>16%</b>	<b>22%</b>

**Stating their wishes**

Q. Have you personally communicated—either to your spouse, family, friends or doctor—your wishes in the event of a serious accident that could leave you in a vegetative state?

	Total	Region						Gender	
		BC	AB	MB/SK	ONT	PQ	ATL	Male	Female
<b>Yes, in writing</b>	<b>12%</b>	<b>9%</b>	<b>14%</b>	<b>13%</b>	<b>13%</b>	<b>13%</b>	<b>5%</b>	<b>12%</b>	<b>12%</b>
<b>Yes, verbally</b>	<b>49%</b>	<b>44%</b>	<b>63%</b>	<b>38%</b>	<b>42%</b>	<b>58%</b>	<b>45%</b>	<b>49%</b>	<b>49%</b>
<b>No</b>	<b>39%</b>	<b>47%</b>	<b>23%</b>	<b>49%</b>	<b>45%</b>	<b>29%</b>	<b>50%</b>	<b>39%</b>	<b>40%</b>

**Stating their wishes**

Q. Have you personally communicated—either to your spouse, family, friends or doctor—your wishes in the event of a serious accident that could leave you in a vegetative state?

	Total	Age			Income		
		18-34	35-54	55+	<\$50K	\$50-99K	\$100K +
<b>Yes, in writing</b>	<b>12%</b>	<b>5%</b>	<b>11%</b>	<b>21%</b>	<b>6%</b>	<b>13%</b>	<b>20%</b>
<b>Yes, verbally</b>	<b>49%</b>	<b>43%</b>	<b>52%</b>	<b>51%</b>	<b>48%</b>	<b>52%</b>	<b>51%</b>
<b>No</b>	<b>39%</b>	<b>52%</b>	<b>37%</b>	<b>29%</b>	<b>45%</b>	<b>35%</b>	<b>29%</b>

**Who should make the call**  
Q. In your view, who should make the final decision on whether to remove a patient in a vegetative state from life support?

	Total	Region						Gender	
		BC	AB	MB/SK	ONT	PQ	ATL	Male	Female
<b>A doctor</b>	<b>15%</b>	<b>24%</b>	<b>9%</b>	<b>15%</b>	<b>14%</b>	<b>11%</b>	<b>25%</b>	<b>13%</b>	<b>16%</b>
<b>A family member</b>	<b>68%</b>	<b>60%</b>	<b>73%</b>	<b>59%</b>	<b>63%</b>	<b>79%</b>	<b>69%</b>	<b>78%</b>	<b>60%</b>
<b>A judge</b>	<b>2%</b>	<b>1%</b>	<b>3%</b>	<b>0%</b>	<b>1%</b>	<b>3%</b>	<b>0%</b>	<b>1%</b>	<b>2%</b>
<b>Not sure</b>	<b>15%</b>	<b>15%</b>	<b>15%</b>	<b>26%</b>	<b>22%</b>	<b>7%</b>	<b>7%</b>	<b>8%</b>	<b>21%</b>

**Who should make the call**  
Q. In your view, who should make the final decision on whether to remove a patient in a vegetative state from life support?

	Total	Age			Income		
		18-34	35-54	55+	<\$50K	\$50-99K	\$100K +
<b>A doctor</b>	<b>15%</b>	<b>12%</b>	<b>14%</b>	<b>20%</b>	<b>16%</b>	<b>15%</b>	<b>11%</b>
<b>A family member</b>	<b>68%</b>	<b>66%</b>	<b>68%</b>	<b>70%</b>	<b>63%</b>	<b>72%</b>	<b>80%</b>
<b>A judge</b>	<b>2%</b>	<b>2%</b>	<b>1%</b>	<b>2%</b>	<b>2%</b>	<b>2%</b>	<b>1%</b>
<b>Not sure</b>	<b>15%</b>	<b>20%</b>	<b>17%</b>	<b>8%</b>	<b>19%</b>	<b>11%</b>	<b>8%</b>

*Angus Reid Strategies is a North American full-service polling and market research firm which is a leader in the use of the Internet and rich media technology to collect high-quality, in-depth insights for a wide array of clients. Dr. Angus Reid and the Angus Reid Strategies team are pioneers in online research methodologies, and have been conducting online surveys since 1995. Located in Vancouver, Calgary, Toronto, and Montreal, our team of specialists provides solutions across every type and sector of research.*

*Angus Reid Strategies polls are conducted using the Angus Reid Forum online panel ([www.angusreidforum.com](http://www.angusreidforum.com)), which is recruited via an industry-leading process that incorporates a randomized, widespread invitation approach and a triple opt-in screening procedure. The panel is maintained through state-of-the-art sampling techniques and frequent verifications of personal identity, contact information, and demographic characteristics. This premier online survey platform presents respondents with highly visual, interactive, and engaging surveys, ensuring that panel members provide thoughtful and reliable responses.*

*Angus Reid Strategies has been successful in predicting the outcome of this year's provincial elections in:*

*Quebec: <http://www.angusreidstrategies.com/index.cfm?fuseaction=news&newsid=37>*

*Manitoba: <http://www.angusreidstrategies.com/index.cfm?fuseaction=news&newsid=56>*

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*More information on the way Angus Reid Strategies conducts public opinion research can be found at <http://angusreidstrategies.com/uploads/pages/pdfs/ARS.ARF.WP.pdf>*

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**For more information, please contact  
our spokesperson listed in the footnote.**

**Copies of this poll are available on our website:  
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