

the conversation project

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Most Americans “relieved” to talk about end-of-life care

New Survey by The Conversation Project finds cultural shift over five years

BOSTON, Mass. (April 10, 2018) – A national survey released today by The Conversation Project reveals that the comfort zone is growing larger for Americans having end-of-life care conversations. For the first time, more than half (53%) of Americans say they would feel relieved if a loved one started “the Conversation.”

This is important because studies also show that the depression experienced by caretakers and family members after a loved one has passed is diminished if they’ve had the conversation in advance of the death. Knowing how people want to live at the end of their lives, the treatment they want and the treatment they don’t want, reduces the guilt and worry that ensues when we fear we are not following the wishes of our loved ones.

One of the significant roadblocks to starting a conversation about wishes for end-of-life care has been the belief that it would make our loved ones anxious. “The survey now shows that talking with the people we love about their wishes for end of life care brings relief, not anxiety,” says Ellen Goodman, founder of The Conversation Project. “This is another important impetus to change.”

Five years ago, the survey showed that more than 90 percent of Americans thought it was important to have the conversation but only 27 percent had it. The new survey of more than 1,000 Americans 18 or older shows a gradual but significant closing of the gap. Some 32 percent have now had these conversations, an increase of five percent or approximately 12.5 million American adults.

“In the past five years we have begun to break the taboo around talking about death,” says Goodman. “There’s a huge cultural shift under way. Virtually everyone knows this is important, but there is still a lingering reluctance to begin.”

Along with the important work of The Conversation Project, which has created a number of guides that assist people in the process of understanding and communicating their end of life care wishes, there are a number of reasons for the increase in social acceptance, Goodman says. She notes that death is now an important topic of bestselling books; death is portrayed more realistically in movies and on TV; legislation now enables doctors to bill Medicare and some insurance companies for the time they spend speaking about end of life care with their patients. “Like giving birth, death is not just a medical experience, it’s a human experience,” Goodman says. “Our understanding of this has grown as the population has aged. Today’s elders and their adult children are more open to thinking about end of life in a more direct and caring way.”

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However, despite the statistically important increase, 68% of Americans have yet to have the conversation. A primary reason many people haven't had the conversation is because they feel it's "too soon." But as Kate DeBartolo, Director of the Conversation Project, says, "Our motto is 'It's always too soon, until it's too late.' The tools we offer can make it much easier to begin."

This is good news, as we approach [National Healthcare Decisions Day](#) (NHDD) – April 16th, the day when thousands of Americans are encouraged to talk to their loved ones or friends about what matters most to them when it comes to end-of-life care. With NHDD activities planned all over the country, April is a great time to start the conversation.

About the Survey –

The Conversation Project Survey was conducted by Kelton Global between January 25th and January 28th, 2018, among 1,004 nationally representative Americans ages 18+. Quotas were set to ensure reliable and accurate representation of the entire U.S. population ages 18 and over. Margin of error = +/- 3.1 percent.

About The Conversation Project

The Conversation Project was launched in 2012 to enable more people to sit down at the kitchen table with family members and friends, and talk about what they want when it comes to end-of-life care. Through a public engagement campaign, a website, story sharing, and guides, the project encourages people to have these discussions long before there's serious illness or a health crisis. Many have taken its message to heart, with more than one million users of The Conversation Project's [Conversation Starter Guides](#) to date. The project also shares free conversation guides for families with people who have Alzheimer's and other dementias, for families with seriously ill children, and for choosing a health care proxy. For more information, visit <https://theconversationproject.org>.

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