Our Purpose

The Conversation Project is a national campaign dedicated to helping people talk about their wishes for end-of-life care. It was founded by Pulitzer Prize winner Ellen Goodman.

Too many people are dying in a way they wouldn't choose, and too many of their loved ones are left feeling bereaved, guilty, and uncertain.

It's time to transform our culture so we shift from not talking about dying to talking about it. It's time to share the way we want to live at the end of our lives. And it's time to communicate about the kind of care we want and don't want for ourselves.

We believe that the place for this to begin is at the kitchen table—not in the intensive care unit—with the people we love, before it's too late. Together we can make these difficult conversations easier. Our goal is to make sure that every person's wishes for end-of-life care are expressed and respected.

Our History

The Conversation Project began in 2010, when Ellen Goodman and a group of colleagues and concerned media, clergy, and medical professionals gathered to share stories of “good deaths” and “hard deaths” within their own circle of loved ones. They realized that the difference between the two experiences often hinged on whether or not they had had the conversation.

Over several months, a vision emerged for a grassroots public campaign spanning both traditional and new media that would change our culture. The goal: to make it easier to initiate conversations about dying, and to encourage people to talk now and as often as necessary so that their wishes are known when the time comes.

In order to make this vision a reality, The Conversation Project began its collaboration with the Institute for Healthcare Improvement (IHI) in September 2011. IHI is a not-for-profit organization that helps lead improvement of health and health care throughout the world. The Conversation Project, which officially launched on August 2012, does not promote any specific preference for end-of-life care. Instead, it seeks to support people as they consider their preferences and share them with those closest to them.

The Conversation Project’s cornerstone is a website that offers users a Conversation Starter Kit, and asks people to submit personal stories to theconversationproject.org, and via YouTube, Twitter, and Facebook. By sparking cultural change at the kitchen table—not in the intensive care unit—The Conversation Project hopes it will become easier for people to express their end-of-life wishes in advance and have them respected at the end.

92%
Ninety-two percent of Americans think it’s important to discuss their end-of-life care wishes

32%
Yet only thirty-two percent have actually shared their wishes.

Source: The Conversation Project National Survey, 2018

One conversation can make all the difference.

Have you had the conversation?
Our Advisors

Key advisors to The Conversation Project include:

**Donald Berwick, MD, MPP, FRCP**
President Emeritus and Senior Fellow, Institute for Healthcare Improvement (IHI), and Former Administrator, Centers for Medicare & Medicaid Services (CMS)

**Maureen Bisognano**
President Emerita and Senior Fellow, Institute for Healthcare Improvement

**Susan Block, MD**
Senior Fellow and Founding Director of the Serious Illness Care Program, Ariadne Labs

**Ira Byock, MD**
Chief Medical Officer, Providence Institute for Human Caring and Professor of Medicine at Geisel School of Medicine at Dartmouth

**Lachlan Forrow, MD**
Associate Professor of Medicine at Harvard Medical School, Director of Ethics Support Service at Beth Israel Deaconess Medical Center, and a member of Harvard Medical School's Division of Service Learning Executive Committee

**Mark B. Ganz**
CEO of Cambia Health Solutions

**Atul Gawande, MD**
Surgeon, writer, public health researcher, and practitioner of general and endocrine surgery at Brigham and Women's Hospital

**Paula Johnson, MD, MPH**
President of Wellesley College

**Phyllis Segal**
Vice President of Encore.org

**Liz Walker**
Reverend, Roxbury Presbyterian Church, and Founder and Principal of The Walker Group LLC

**Harriet Warshaw**
Advisor and Former Director of The Conversation Project

**Jay Winsten**
Associate Dean of the Harvard School of Public Health, and Director of the Frank Stanton Center for Health Communication

**Ruth Wooden**
Retired President of Public Agenda, and Union Theological Seminary Student

**Charlotte Yeh, MD**
Chief Medical Officer for AARP Services, Inc.