

Voluntary Assisted Dying

FINAL REPORT
10 March 2023



ACT
Government

YOUR SAY
PANEL



Background

This report presents the findings of the voluntary assisted dying (VAD) survey. Fieldwork was conducted between 7-21 February 2023, collecting n=2,937 completes.

The purpose of this survey was to help the ACT Government gain a better understanding of the Canberra community's awareness and knowledge about voluntary assisted dying.

An email reminder was distributed during the middle of fieldwork (12 February).

Methodology notes:

- All Panel members were invited to take part in the survey
- An external panel provider was used to target 18-44 year old Canberrans, achieving n=127 completes (representing 4.3% out of the total n=2,937 sample)
- Results have been weighted by age, gender and region using 2021 ABS Census population data
- For reporting of significance testing, results that are significantly higher than the total result have been shaded blue or marked with an upwards blue arrow (↑), whereas results that are significantly lower than the total have been shaded in red or marked with a downwards red arrow (↓)



How many?

2,937

Who?

Canberrans 18+

When?

7-21 Feb 2023

Executive summary



High levels of awareness and interest in ACT Government plans relating to voluntary assisted dying

85% were already aware of the ACT Government's intentions to introduce laws to legalise voluntary assisted dying. The high levels of awareness may, in part, be because the survey was publicly promoted via social media and other channels, meaning we heard from a more interested and engaged audience on the topic.



Strong interest across several aspects of voluntary assisted dying

There was high interest in understanding the criteria for a person to be eligible (84%), and the process for requesting and accessing voluntary assisted dying (76%). Interest in the safeguards required to protect patient safety (64%) and the role of family, friends or carers (63%) also rated highly.



A broad range of expected criteria or safeguards in a voluntary assisted dying model

Overall a broad range of criteria was suggested, however the most common suggestions included having the ability to request voluntary assisted dying prior to illness/injury (14%), making voluntary assisted dying available for non-terminal conditions (13%), and appropriate counselling options for those considering voluntary assisted dying (13%).



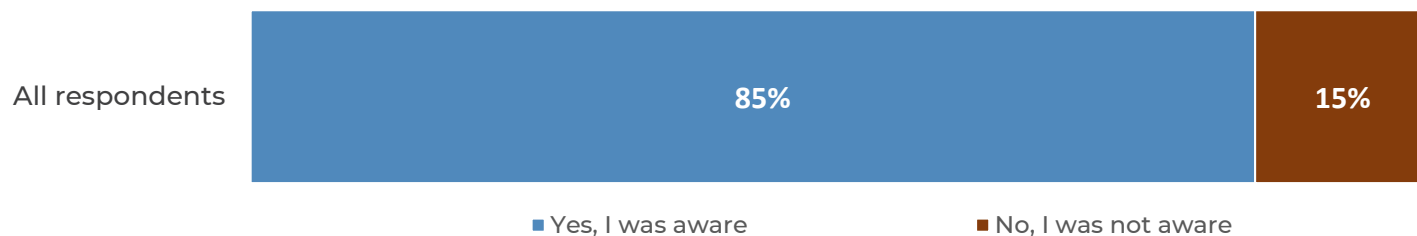
Final comments about voluntary assisted dying

As the survey was not designed to measure support about voluntary assisted dying, some respondents used the final open-ended questions as an opportunity to express their support or opposition to the idea. Those declaring their general support for voluntary assisted dying often shared personal stories of witnessing family or friends suffer for long periods of time. Those opposed to voluntary assisted dying often highlighted how it was against their personal moral or religious beliefs.

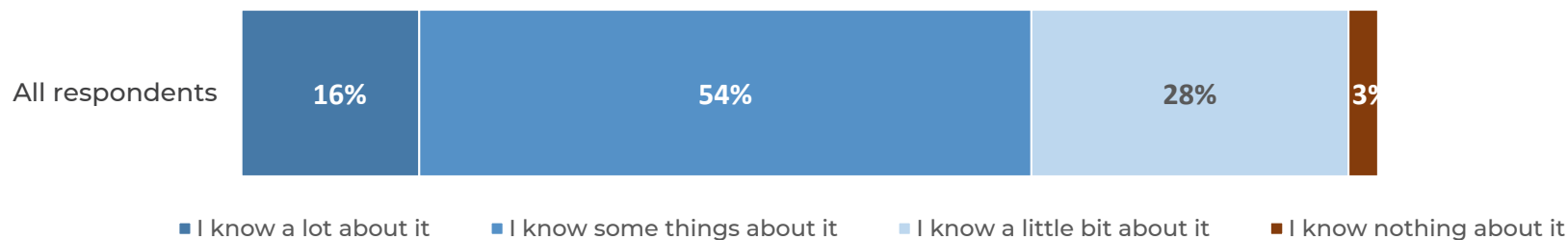
Results

Awareness and knowledge of voluntary assisted dying

Q3. Before today, were you aware that the ACT Government intends to introduce laws to legalise and regulate access to voluntary assisted dying?

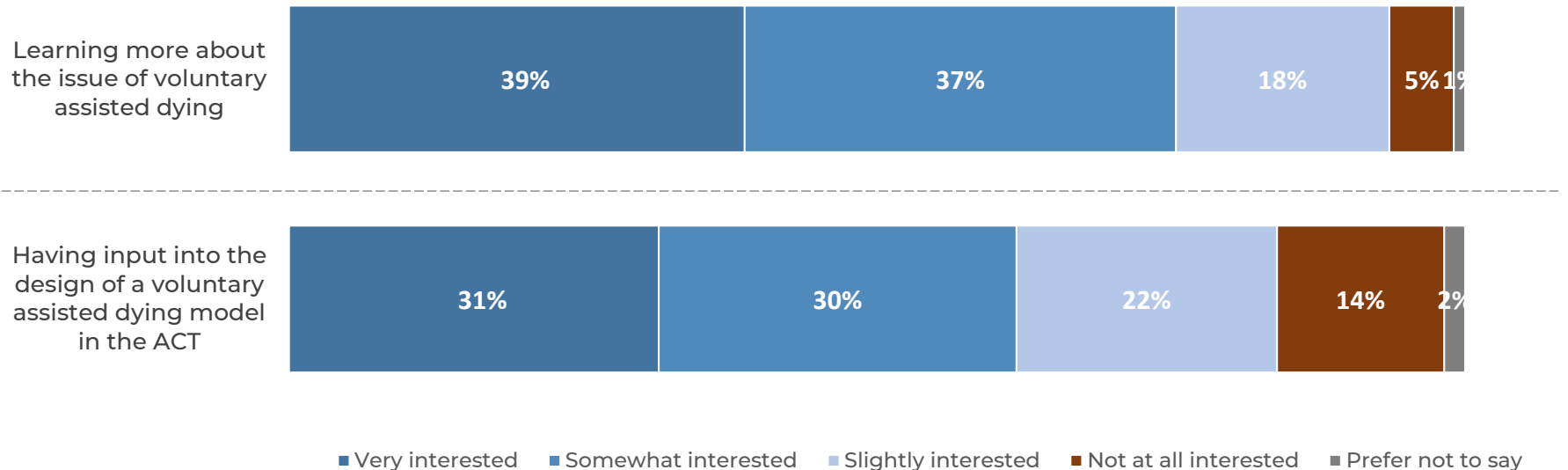


Q4. And how much do you know about the topic of voluntary assisted dying?



Interest in learning about voluntary assisted dying

Q5. How interested are you in each of the following topics...



Key results by demographics

Although **males** were more likely to be aware that VAD laws were being introduced (87%), they were less likely to be interested in having input into the model's design (58%) or learning more about VAD (70%). In contrast, **females** were more likely to be interested in learning more about VAD (81%).

Awareness and knowledge of VAD was lowest among young audiences **aged 18-34** (76% and 65% respectively). These scores gradually increased with each older age group, culminating in **55+ year old's** recording the highest levels of awareness (95%) and knowledge (78%). Older audiences were also more likely to be interested in learning more about VAD (86%) and having input into the model (67%).

Results were broadly consistent across Canberra regions, with only a few significant differences observed.¹

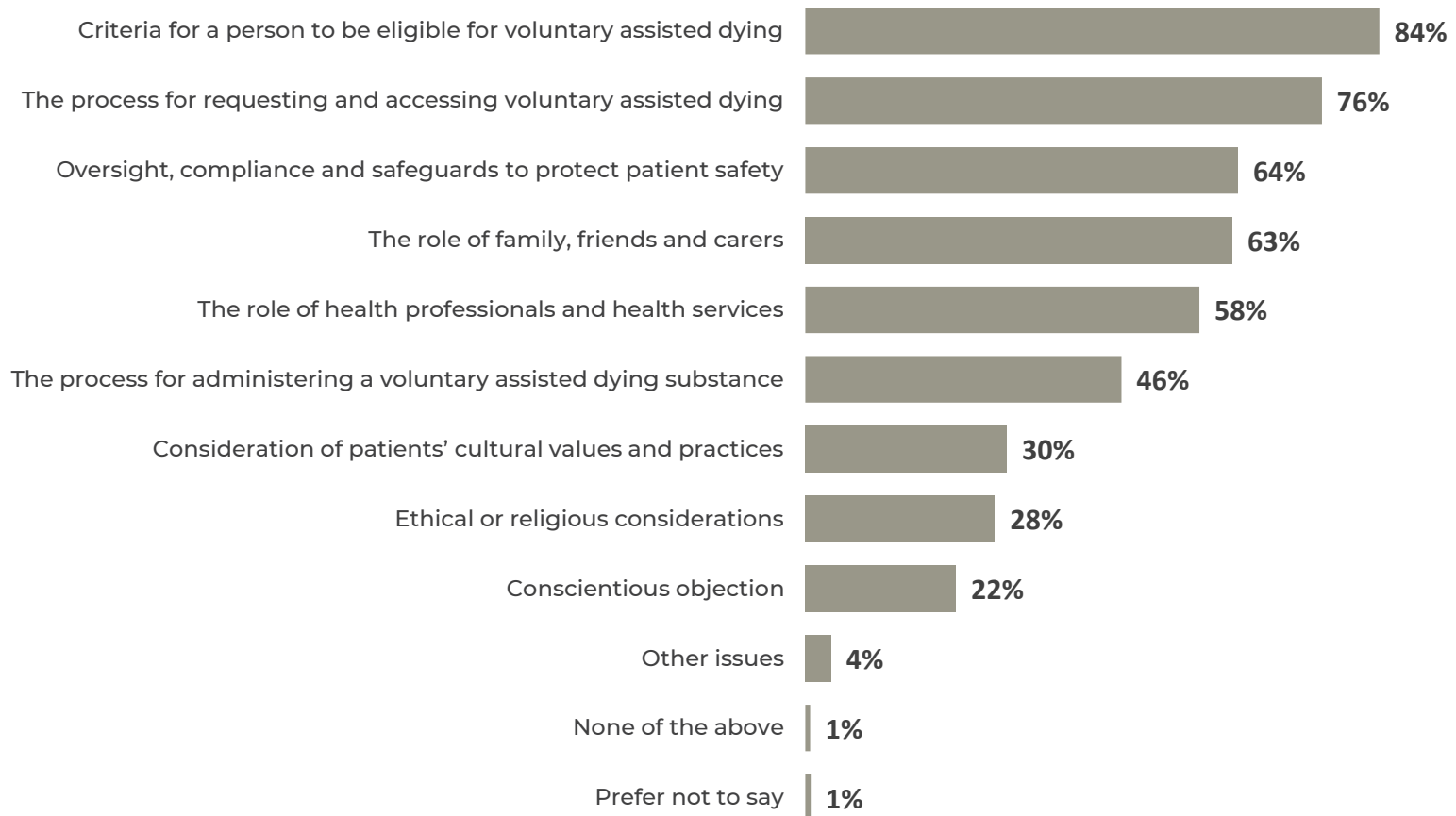
	Total (n=2,937)	Female (n=1,793)	Male (n=1,090)	18-34 (n=516)	35-54 (n=1,179)	55+ (n=1,242)
Aware that ACT Government intends to introduce laws to legalise and regulate VAD (% Yes, I was aware)	85%	83%	87% ↑	76% ↓	85%	95% ↑
Self-rated knowledge about VAD (% know a lot + know some things)	69%	69%	68%	65% ↓	66%	78% ↑
Interest in learning more about VAD (% very interested + somewhat interested)	75%	81% ↑	70% ↓	73%	69% ↓	86% ↑
Interest in having input into the design of a VAD model (% very interested + somewhat interested)	62%	64%	58% ↓	62%	57% ↓	67% ↑

¹ Significant differences observed by region included:

- Belconnen residents were more likely to record higher awareness (88%)
- Those in the Inner South recorded higher self-rated knowledge about VAD (76%)

Interest in aspects of voluntary assisted dying model

*Q6. And which aspects of voluntary assisted dying, if any, are you most interested in?
(Multiple response)*



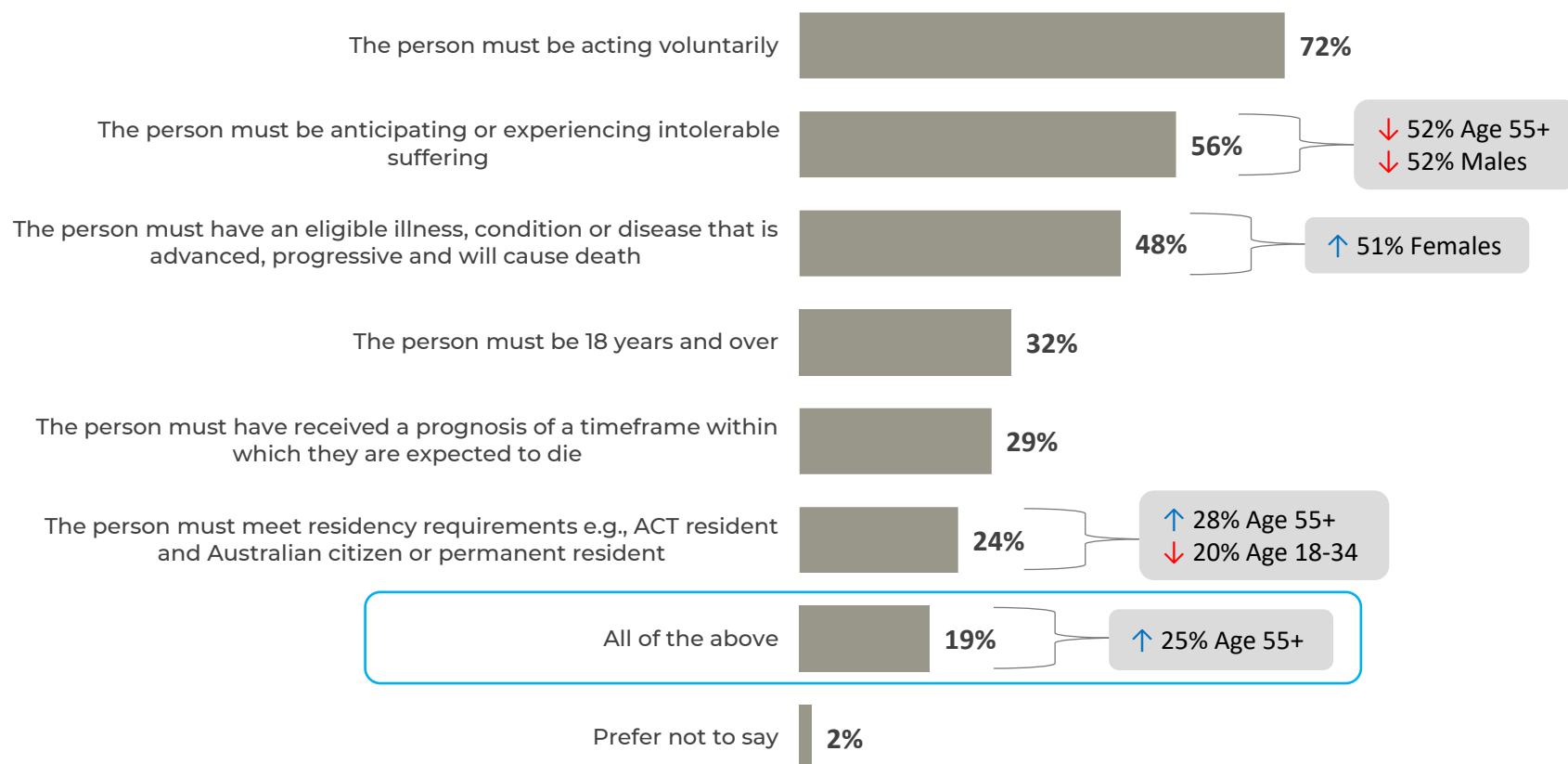
Interest in aspects of voluntary assisted dying model – by demographics

*Q6. And which aspects of voluntary assisted dying, if any, are you most interested in?
(Multiple response)*

	TOTAL (n=2,837)	Females (n=1,740)	Males (n=1,044)	18-34 (n=494)	35-54 (n=1,131)	55+ (n=1,212)
Criteria for a person to be eligible for voluntary assisted dying	84%	86%	82%	83%	83%	88% ↑
The process for requesting and accessing voluntary assisted dying	76%	79% ↑	72% ↓	73%	72% ↓	83% ↑
Oversight, compliance and safeguards to protect patient safety	64%	64%	63%	59% ↓	65%	67%
The role of family, friends and carers	63%	66% ↑	59% ↓	59% ↓	62%	69% ↑
The role of health professionals and health services	58%	62% ↑	53% ↓	52% ↓	56%	67% ↑
The process for administering a voluntary assisted dying substance	46%	49%	43%	44%	42% ↓	54% ↑
Consideration of patients' cultural values and practices	30%	30%	28%	33% ↑	27%	28%
Ethical or religious considerations	28%	25% ↓	31% ↑	31%	27%	24% ↓
Conscientious objection	22%	18% ↓	26% ↑	27% ↑	23%	16% ↓
Other issues	4%	3%	4%	3%	4%	5%
None of the above	1%	1%	1%	1%	1%	0%
Prefer not to say	1%	1%	0%	0%	1%	1%

Expected criteria to be eligible for voluntary assisted dying

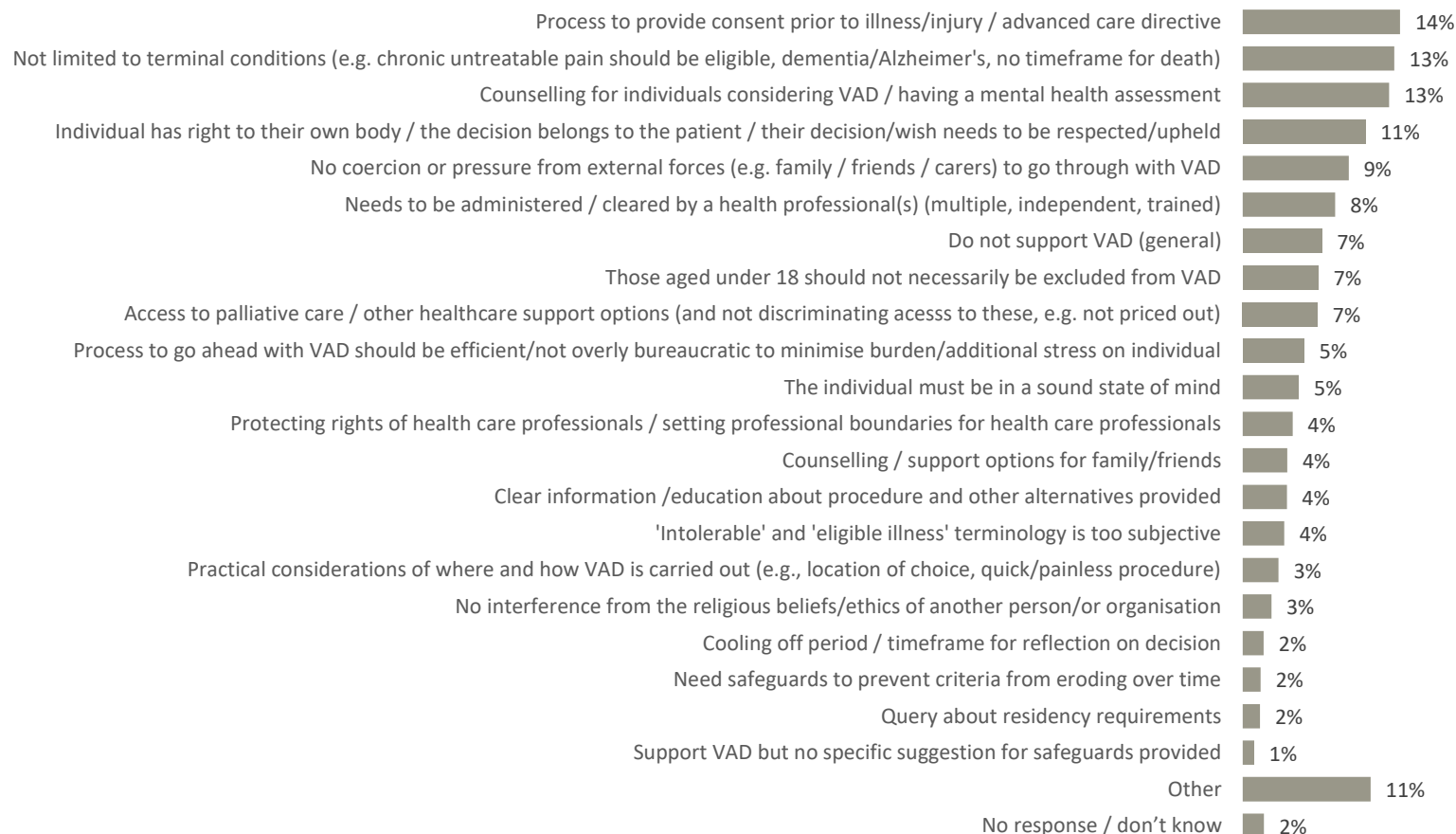
*Q7. Which of the following eligibility criteria would you expect to be in place as part of the introduction of voluntary assisted dying in the ACT?
(Multiple response)*



Suggestions for safeguards / eligibility criteria

In an open-ended question, respondents who were interested in 'safeguards' or 'eligibility criteria' were asked to write what other safeguards they expect to be in place to ensure VAD is safe and effective.

The most common suggestions included having the ability to plan for VAD prior to illness/injury (e.g. through an advanced care directive) (14%), having VAD available for illnesses that are not immediately terminal (e.g. dementia), and making counselling options available for those considering VAD.

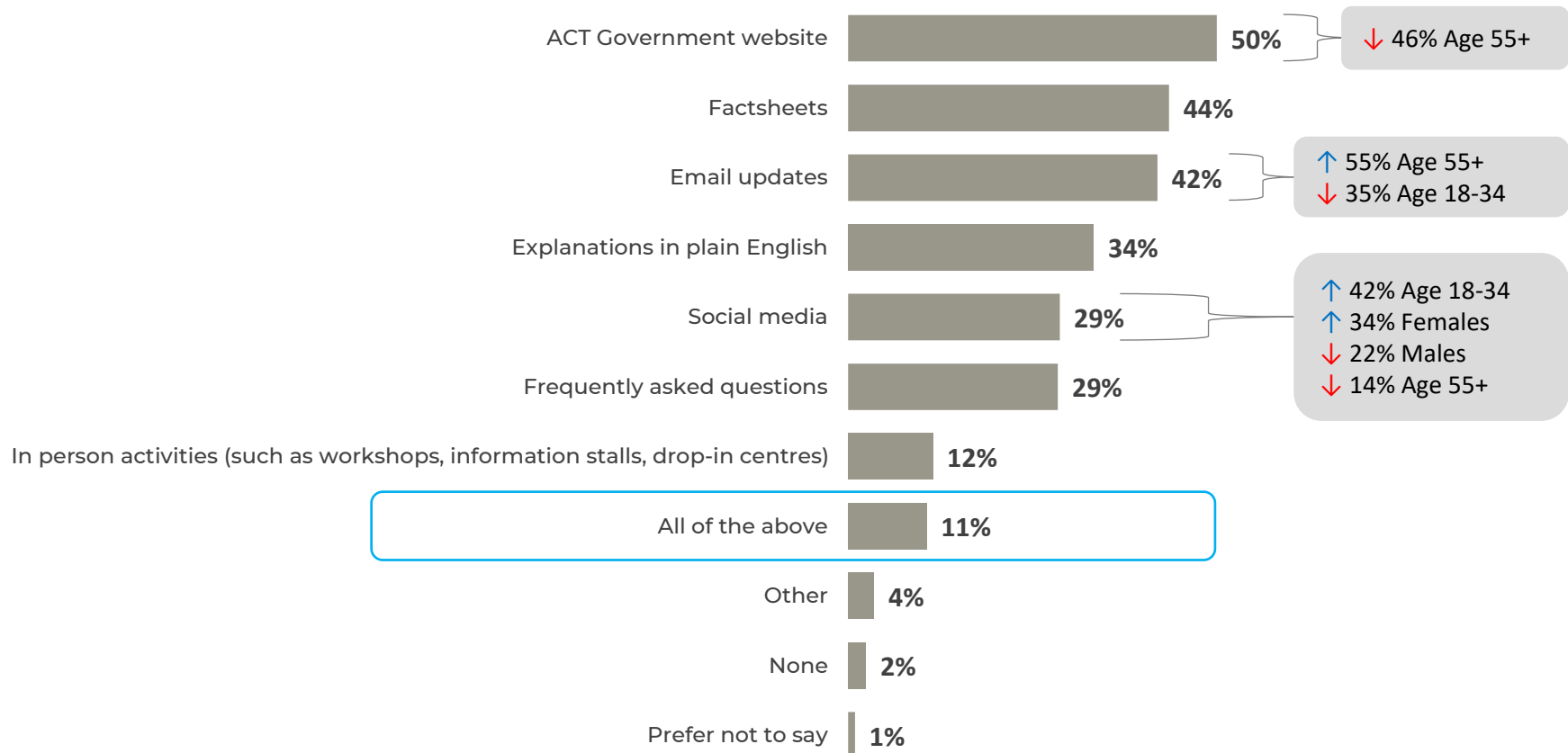


Note: This question was only asked to those who selected 'safeguards' or 'eligibility criteria' at Q6.

n=888

Preferred information channels

*Q8. And how would you prefer to be engaged and kept informed about the introduction of voluntary assisted dying in the ACT?
(Multiple response)*

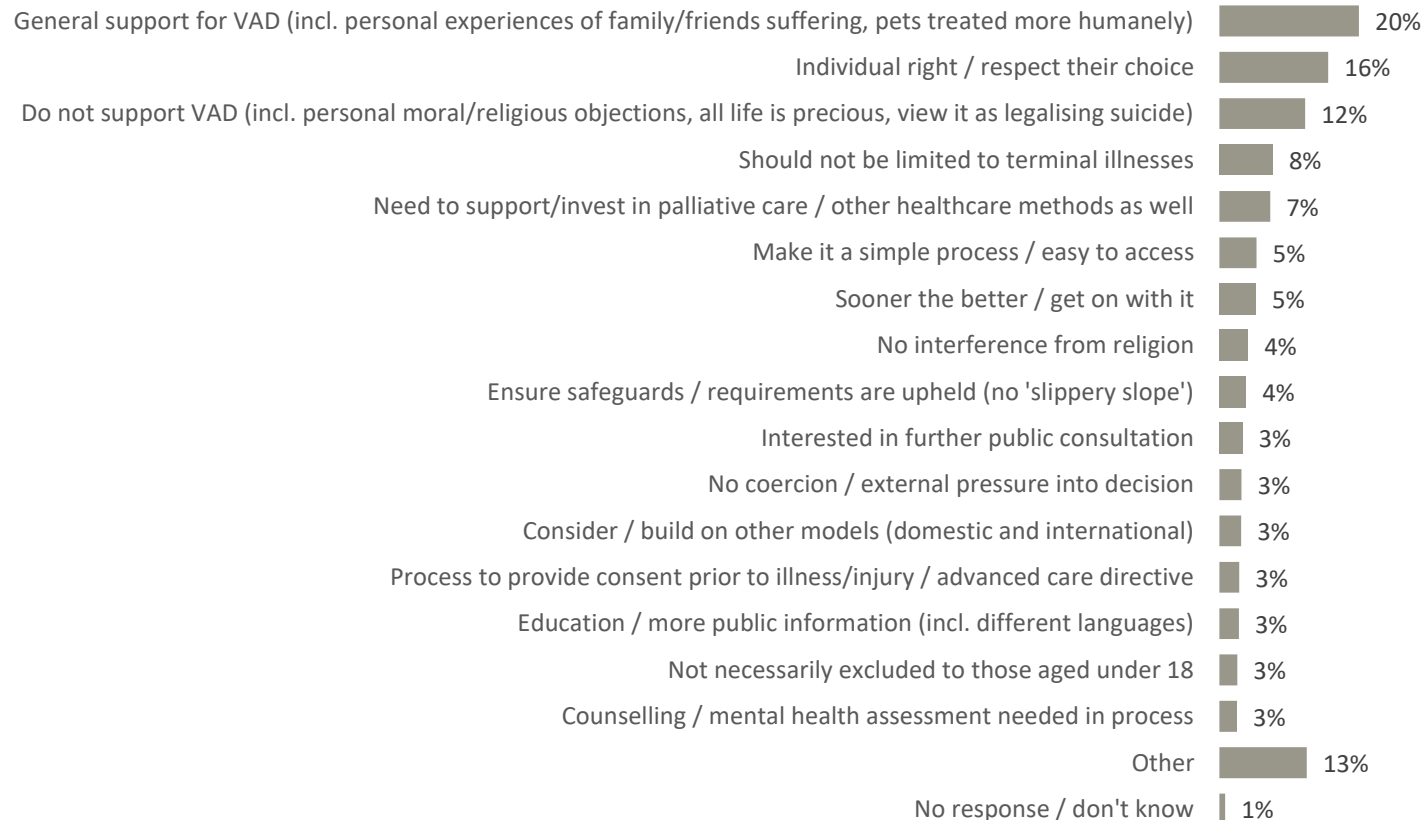


Final comments about voluntary assisted dying

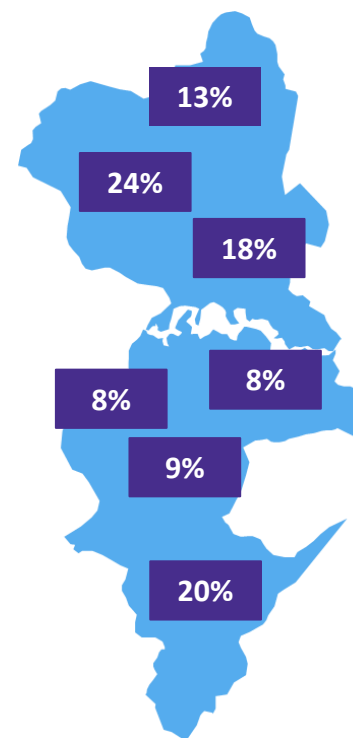
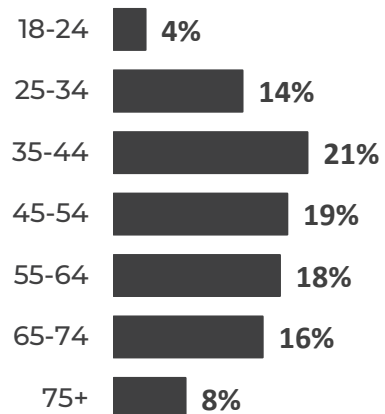
In an open-ended question, respondents were able to provide any final thoughts about the topic of voluntary assisted dying, with 749 people, or one quarter of all respondents, taking up this opportunity.

Many raised further specific comments about the process and models, while some (20%) used the opportunity to emphasise their support for voluntary assisted dying. This group often shared personal stories of witnessing family or friends suffer for long periods of time, and in many of these cases, the family or friend had requested to die (but this request was not able to be fulfilled).

Some other respondents (12%) used this question to voice their objection to VAD - often highlighting how it was against their personal morals/beliefs, referring to it as 'assisted suicide', and that it undermines society's efforts to take care of the vulnerable.

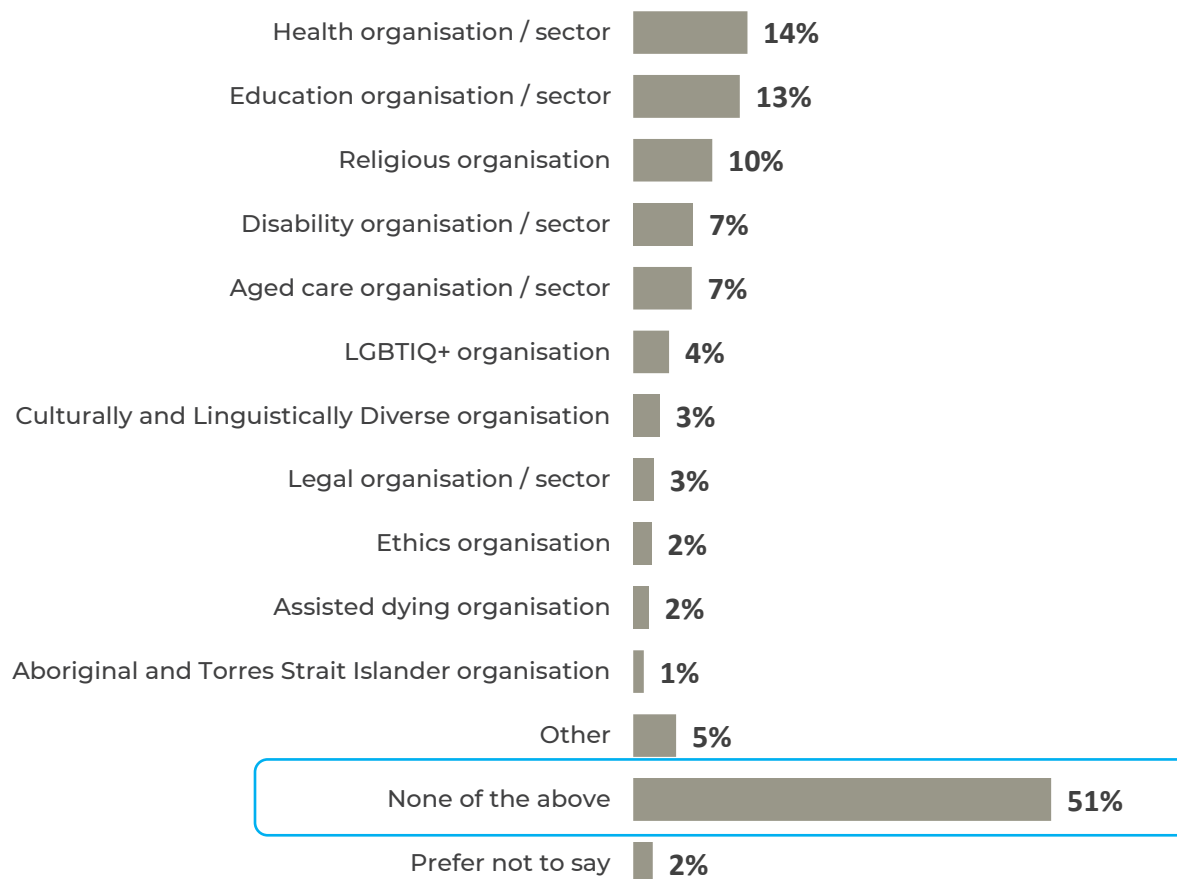


Sample profile (unweighted)



Sample profile (unweighted)

*QD3. Which of the following organisations or sectors, if any, are you involved in?
(Multiple response)*





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