

Compassion & Choices of Northern California Frequently Asked Questions

What does Compassion & Choices of Northern California do?

Compassion & Choices of Northern California informs and educates the public about end-of-life choices and care. We serve terminally-ill, mentally competent adults who seek the right to a humane and peaceful death. We advocate for improved care and expanded choice at life's end. Our local Northern California Chapter supports the National organization in all ways possible.

Are you affiliated with the Hemlock Society?

We are the evolution of the Hemlock Society. Several years after the Hemlock Society changed its name to End-of-Life Choices and underwent other modifications, that organization merged with Compassion in Dying to become one national organization, Compassion & Choices. We are the Northern California Chapter of Compassion & Choices, based in San Francisco and serving most of Northern California.

Do you break any laws?

No.

What is the difference between what Compassion & Choices of Northern California does and assisted suicide?

"Suicide" is the desperate act of a person suffering from mental illness. We support the right of terminally-ill, mentally competent adults to choose a peaceful death, and offer counseling and support by trained volunteers, under careful guidelines. A growing number of experts in professional organizations call this "aid-in-dying."

What are the legal issues involved in supporting end-of-life choices?

Our primary concern in this area is working to expand the right to choose aid-in-dying, which currently is expressly legal only in the State of Oregon. A California bill patterned closely after the Oregon Death with Dignity Act, sponsored by Compassion & Choices and introduced by Assemblymembers Patty Berg and Lloyd Levine in 2007, had widespread support but was narrowly defeated (by one vote) in the Senate Committee on the Judiciary and was therefore withdrawn. Further information on legal issues can be found in the News section of our Web site and on the National Web site.

What is your stand on Dr. Jack Kevorkian?

While we empathize with many of those who sought Dr. Kevorkian's help, we strongly disagree with his methods, his flagrant disregard of the law and the absence of ethical guidelines to the work he did. More on Compassion & Choice's response to this issue can be found on the National Web site.

What is the difference between assisted suicide and euthanasia?

Euthanasia, which we do not support, allows someone else to bring about the death of an individual. See above for explanation of the difference between "assisted suicide" and aid-in-dying.

How can I get questions answered and be assured of confidentiality?

We strictly honor the confidentiality of clients and potential clients. Our volunteers sign agreements to this policy. If you have any question at all, please call 1-866-825-8967, or e-mail admin@compassionandchoicesnca.org. We will make sure the appropriate member of our organization returns your call. You can also contact our End of Life Consultation Services in Oregon directly by calling 1-800-247-7421.

If I use your services, what will it cost me?

No, all of our services are free.