

IDAHO END-OF-LIFE SURVEY

Fall 2006

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A Better Way Coalition: Life on Our Own Terms and the **Center for the Study of Aging** at Boise State University collaborated in this effort to gather Idaho-specific data about views on end-of-life issues.

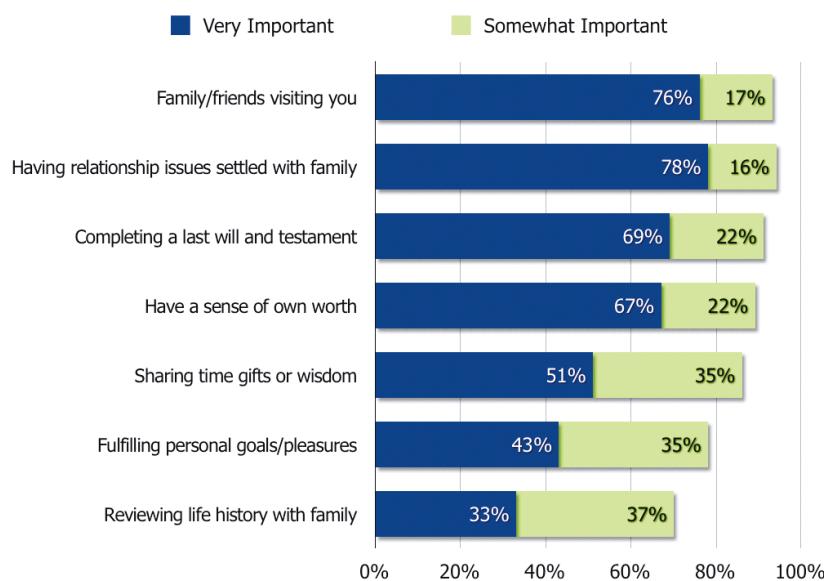
Sponsoring members of the Coalition provided resources for printing, postage, and other costs while the Center matched these and managed the project. The objective of this project was to capture information that can help Idaho service providers and policy makers better understand the preferences and needs of people as they near the end of life.

The 12-page survey was mailed to a random sample of 3,003 Idaho residents over the age of 35 in February 2006. Over thirty-nine percent, or 1,181 people returned their surveys. The survey was designed to collect information on attitudes, beliefs, experiences, and behaviors related to end-of-life preferences and planning as well as basic demographic and health-status information. Similar surveys have been administered in other states and numerous communities around the country. The Idaho version was based on a questionnaire developed by the Missoula Demonstration Project and most recently adapted for the Massachusetts Commission on End-of-Life Care. The Idaho version contained only minor wording changes to reflect state specific laws, programs, resources, and a small number of additional items.

Meaning & Spirituality

Meaning and spirituality are closely related for many people and dying can be viewed as a spiritual process that deepens the meaning of life. While the specifics of religious or spiritual beliefs and practices vary, their importance is underscored by the survey results.

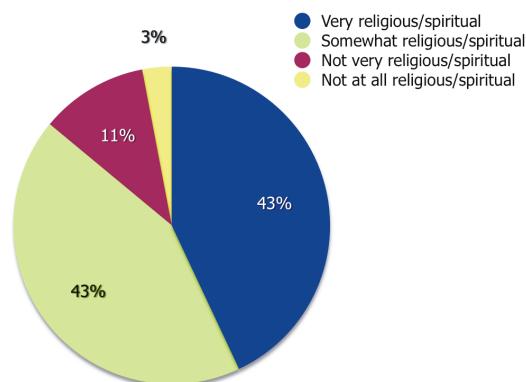
People in Idaho understand the meaning and value of end of life and the importance of completing life well. They rated the following things as very important or somewhat important in thinking about dealing with their own dying:



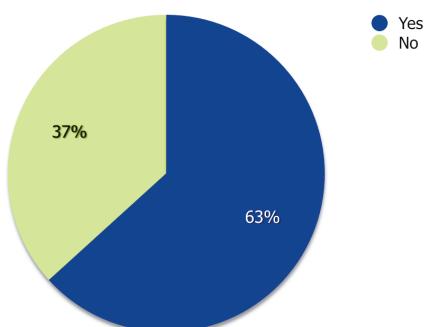
Spirituality plays a significant role at the end of life.

- ◆ 86% consider themselves very or somewhat spiritual
- ◆ 62% are affiliated with an organized faith community
- ◆ 80% said being at peace spiritually is very important when they think about dying
- ◆ 52% report that their spiritual practice or religion affect end-of-life choices to a great extent

Do you consider yourself...



Are you affiliated with an organized faith community?



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Profile of Survey Respondents

3,003 surveys mailed
1,181 returned (39.3%)

Age

50% aged 45 to 64
18% 44 and younger
18% 65 to 74
13% 75 and older

Sex

42% male
57% female

Marital Status

72% married
10% divorced
10% widowed

Education

46% some college or technical training
20% high school diploma
18% college graduates
12% professional degree or post-graduate coursework

Employment

44% full time
30% retired and not working
15% part time
9% other, like homemaker
1% unemployed

Income

30% \$20,000 to \$39,000
29% \$60,000 or more
21% \$40,000 to \$59,000

Health

33% very good
31% good
18% excellent
14% fair
3% poor

Region

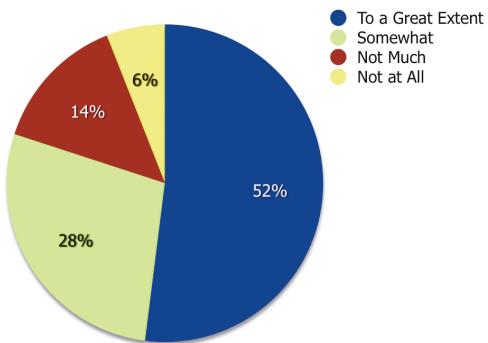
43% western part of the state
40% eastern
17% northern

Race/Ethnicity

94% White
4% Hispanic or Latino
2% American Indian or Alaskan Native

*percentages may not add to 100 as all survey respondents did not complete all items

How does your spiritual practice/
religion affect your end-of-life decision making?



People want spiritual leaders and faith communities to be involved in their end-of-life care.

- ◆ Between 24% and 41% indicated their faith community should provide support ranging from encouraging them when they are down to providing transportation
- ◆ 24% want spiritual leaders/clergy to initiate a conversation with them about end of life

Next Steps

Acknowledging that “dying is a spiritual process with medical implications, not a medical process with spiritual implication”¹ will require changes in attitudes, policies and behaviors. A reform of this magnitude will take time, but some actions are possible now. We can aim for the following:

1. Families, communities and the state of Idaho recognizes the value of growing older which is demonstrated in behaviors, services and policies.
2. Dying and death is not viewed as a “failure” but an important part of life.
3. Faith leaders learn about and acquire the necessary skills to respond to the unique spiritual needs of people nearing the end of life.
4. People who do not identify with a specific faith community receive care that promotes spiritual peace.
5. Listening to life stories of dying people is made a priority and they feel valued and recognized for a lifetime of contributions.
6. People seek to understand the needs of dying people in their faith communities and provide various types of support at the end of life.
7. Achieving spiritual peace is recognized to be as important as relief from pain and management of physical symptoms by all professionals providing care at the end of life.
8. Family and relationship issues are settled with people who are dying so that resolution can bring peace and people are able to say good-bye.

Reference

1. State Initiatives in End-of-Life Care. Shifting Reform Paradigms: Spiritual and Cultural Matters. *State Initiatives in End-of-Life Care*; 2006:4.

More Information...

Additional copies of this focus brief, as well as three focus briefs on other topics, an executive summary of the project, the full report of the survey results are available in electronic formats from the websites of A Better Way Coalition (www.abetterwaycoalition.org) and the Center for the Study of Aging (aging.boisestate.edu). For additional information, please contact the Center at 208-426-5802 or aging@boisestate.edu.