

District of Columbia Death with Dignity Act

2020 Data Summary



Death with Dignity Executive Summary

DC | **HEALTH**

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GOVERNMENT OF THE
DISTRICT OF COLUMBIA
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The District of Columbia Death with Dignity Act of 2016, DC Law 21-182, was effective on February 18, 2017, and applicable as of June 6, 2017. The Act establishes a process by which competent terminally ill residents of the District of Columbia can legally obtain a physician's prescription for drugs to end their life in a humane and peaceful manner. Terminally ill patients must be District of Columbia residents who have been medically confirmed to have less than six months to live.

The Department of Health (DC Health) was engaged in a number of educational activities during the third year the Death with Dignity law was in effect. A *Death with Dignity Insights from Physicians and Family Members* seminar jointly sponsored by Compassion and Choices and DC Health was held for health care professionals on October 25, 2019. The presentation provided an opportunity for physicians and family members to discuss their experiences as they proceeded through the process.

2020 Statistics

The DC Health is required by law to collect compliance information and issue an annual report. The participation summary is for the period of February 19, 2019, to February 18, 2020. During this period, there were two prescriptions written for a covered medication¹, two qualified patients² with written prescribed and dispensed medications. Both qualified patients died after ingesting the prescribed covered medications. Two physicians wrote prescriptions for covered medications (Table 1). Figure 1 shows trends from 2018 to 2020.

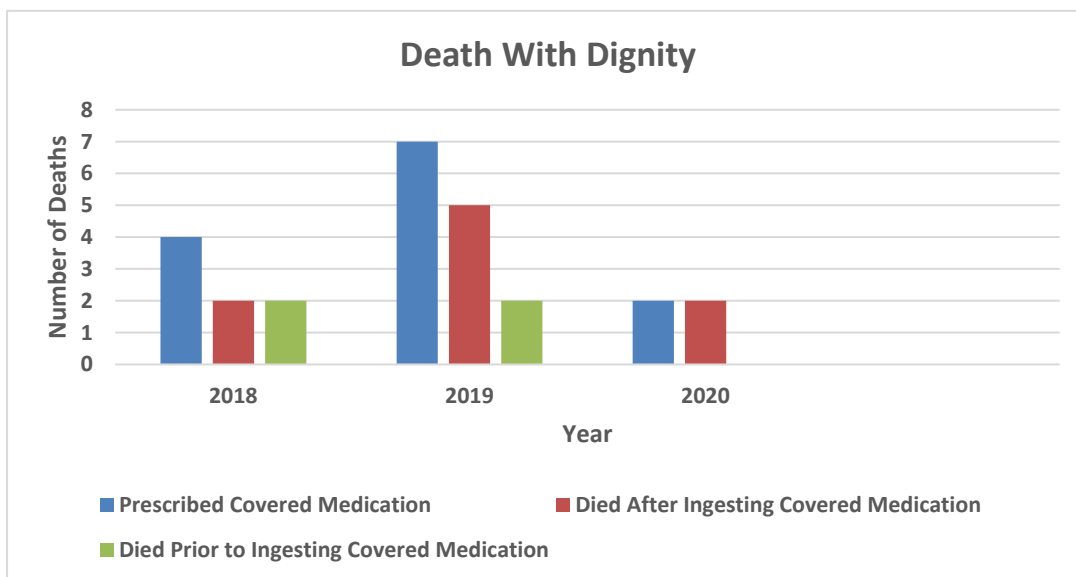
¹ As defined in D.C. Official Code § 7-661.01(5).

² As defined in D.C. Official Code § 7-661.01(15).

Table 1. Death with Dignity Participants, District of Columbia, 2020			
Number of qualified patients for whom a prescription for a covered medication was written.	Number of known qualified patients who died each year for whom a prescription for a covered medication was written, and the cause of death of those patients.	Number of known deaths in the District from using a covered medication.	Number of physicians who wrote prescriptions for a covered medication.
2	2	2	2
Demographic characteristics for qualified patients who consumed a covered medication and died.			
Age at death	78	87	
Education level, if known	Master's Degree	Bachelor's Degree	
Race	White	White	
Sex	Male	Female	
Type of insurance, including whether or not they had insurance, if known	Government ³	Unknown	
Terminal disease	Neurodegenerative Disease	Cancer	
Patients for whom a prescription for a covered medication was written but died prior to ingesting the covered medication.			
N/A			

Source: District of Columbia Department of Health, Health Regulation and Licensing Administration

Figure 1. Number of Death with Dignity participants and known deaths, District of Columbia, 2018 to 2020.



Source: District of Columbia Department of Health, Health Regulation and Licensing Administration

³ Government health insurance refers to any insurance program run by U.S. federal, state, or local governments in which people have some or all of their healthcare costs paid for by the government. The two main types of public health insurance are Medicare and Medicaid.