

Poll: New Jerseyans are not prepared for their end-of-life health care

April 29, 2014 12:10PM

By [Beth Fitzgerald](#)

While many New Jerseyans are comfortable with the idea of planning for their end-of-life health care, few are actually putting a plan in writing or saving money for their health future, according to a new poll by Monmouth University and the New Jersey Health Care Quality Institute.

Health experts have long noted that New Jersey is among the most expensive states for end-of-life care, with New Jerseyans more likely to receive intense medical interventions in their final days and spend more time in a hospital intensive care unit.

But hospice care is on the rise and there's a movement underway to encourage New Jerseyans to create living wills that spell out their end of life care wishes.

The "Health Matters Poll," found that most New Jerseyans have had some sort of discussion about their wishes for end-of-life medical treatment, but few have actually made specific plans.

Most residents say they are comfortable thinking about the idea of getting older, including 45 percent who are very comfortable and 28 percent who are somewhat comfortable with the idea.

Another 26 percent say getting older is something they would rather not think about.

Men (50 percent) are more likely than women (40 percent) to say they are very comfortable with the idea of getting older. The poll found that 6-in-10 New Jersey adults say they have thought about their own wishes for medical treatment if they had a disease with no hope of improvement that caused a great deal of pain.

"We know that end-of-life decisions and conversations are some of the most difficult and stressful conversations family members can have," said David L. Knowlton, chief executive of the New Jersey Health Care Quality Institute. "It is encouraging that so many New Jerseyans are at least comfortable with thinking these issues over. The challenge now is to translate that comfort into a meaningful conversation and a written plan that fulfills their wishes."

While more than 62 percent of residents have discussed their wishes for end of life medical treatment with someone, fewer than half (45 percent) have put those wishes down in writing, such as in a living will.

"While nearly half of New Jerseyans say they have put their wishes in writing, there is some uncertainty whether it is written in a format that will be honored or even if family members know where to find those documents if the person was incapacitated," said Patrick Murray, director of the Monmouth University Polling Institute.

The survey also examined state residents' financial planning for end of life needs.

Two-thirds of New Jerseyans say they are at least somewhat confident they will have the resources required to pay for any care they may require as they get older, but only 1-in-4 have started to save for those expenses.

The poll found that 27 percent of residents say they have set aside money to pay for ongoing living assistance expenses, including care in a nursing home, senior community or care from a home health aide, with higher income respondents more likely to be putting money aside. Just 16 percent of those who earn less than \$50,000 a year have started to save for end of life needs, compared to one-third of those who earn \$50,000 to just under \$100,000 (33 percent) or \$100,000 or more (32 percent).

The poll found that no more than 25 percent of any income group reports that they are very confident they will have the resources necessary to meet their potential end of life care expenses.

ALSO ON NJBIZ:

[Most-read April 28: NJBIZ names Healthcare Heroes awards finalists for 2014](#)

[Construction to begin soon on American Dream project following labor agreement](#)

[DressBarn parent company Ascena opens new Mahwah headquarters](#)

www.NJBIZ.com