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Background

- Euthanasia and certain forms of assisted dying are currently legal or decriminalized in just a few countries
- Organizations concerned about end of life issues have issued several 'declarations' to promulgate their views on assisted dying/euthanasia to draw public attention, and to call for change
- Several of them make reference to palliative care
- Little is known about assisted dying/euthanasia declarations and their relationship to palliative care

Aims

- To map the emergence and analyse the characteristics of assisted dying/euthanasia declarations in the international context
- To establish the representation and framing of palliative care in these declarations

Methods

Collection of declarations

- Systematic searches on the Internet using the key words: 'assisted dying', 'euthanasia' in combination with 'declaration', 'manifesto', 'charter' and 'statement'
- Web site scrutiny of associations and organizations involved in advocacy on end of life issues

Analysis

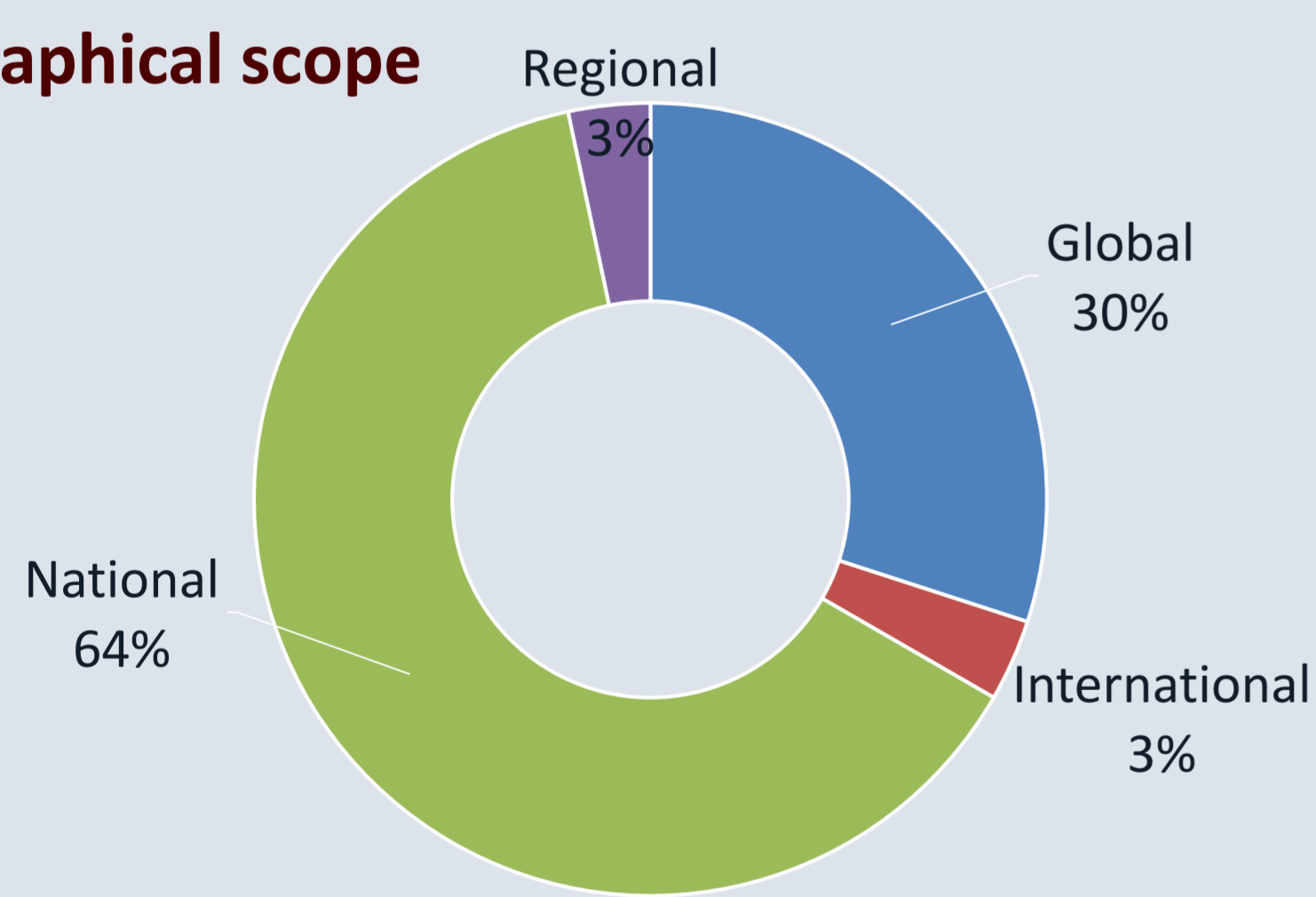
- A timeline of palliative and end-of-life care declarations was created
- Content analysis was undertaken to identify the geographical scope, originating organizations, format of the documents, and standpoint expressed on assisted dying/euthanasia
- References to palliative care were examined for their content

Results

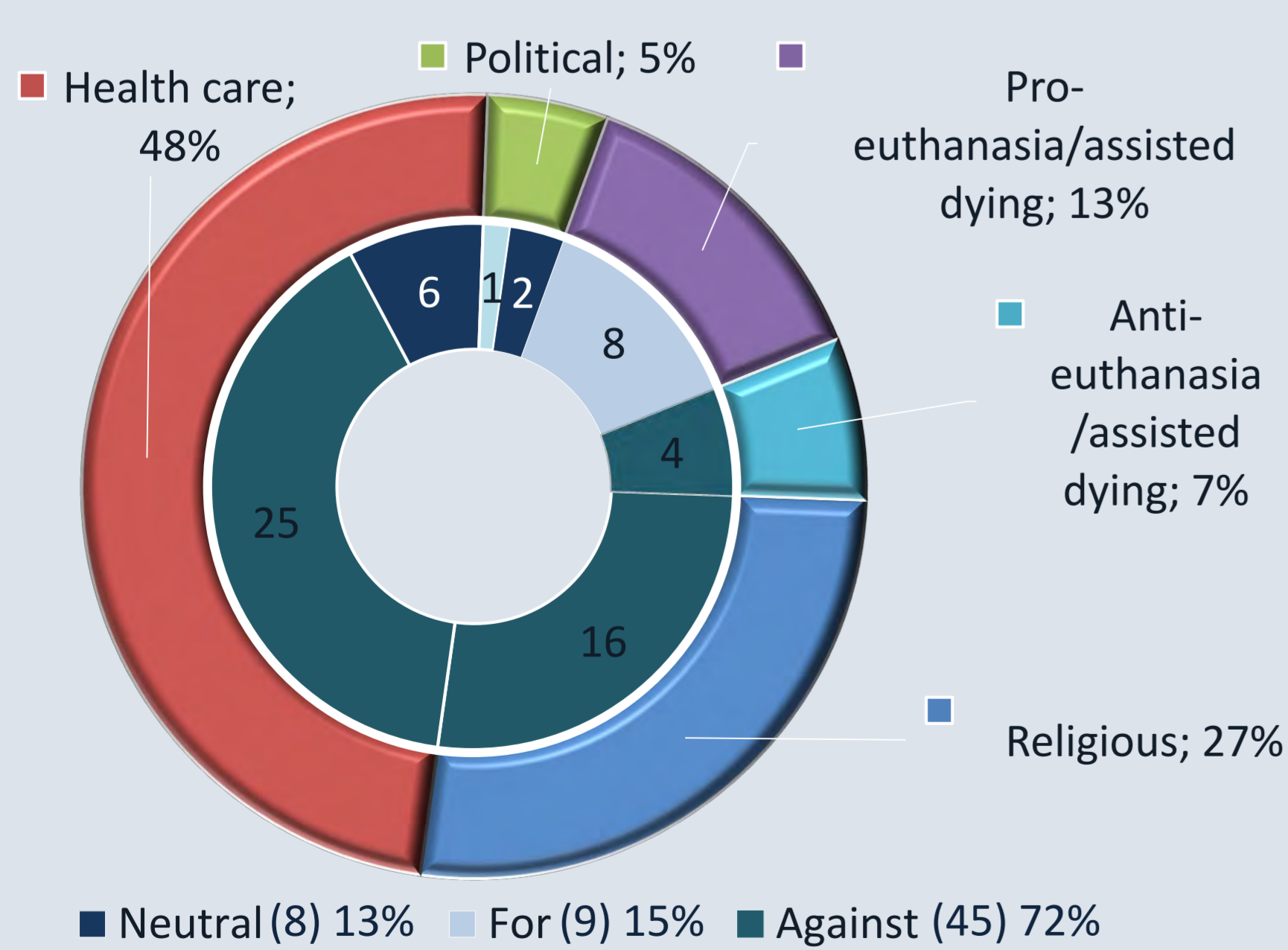
Timeline

- 62 assisted dying/euthanasia declarations published in English language were identified (1947 to 2016)
- Year of publication was identified for 51 declarations
- The timeline of 51 declarations suggests a progressive increase in their production
- Declarations with different viewpoints showed prominence over specific periods of time

Geographical scope



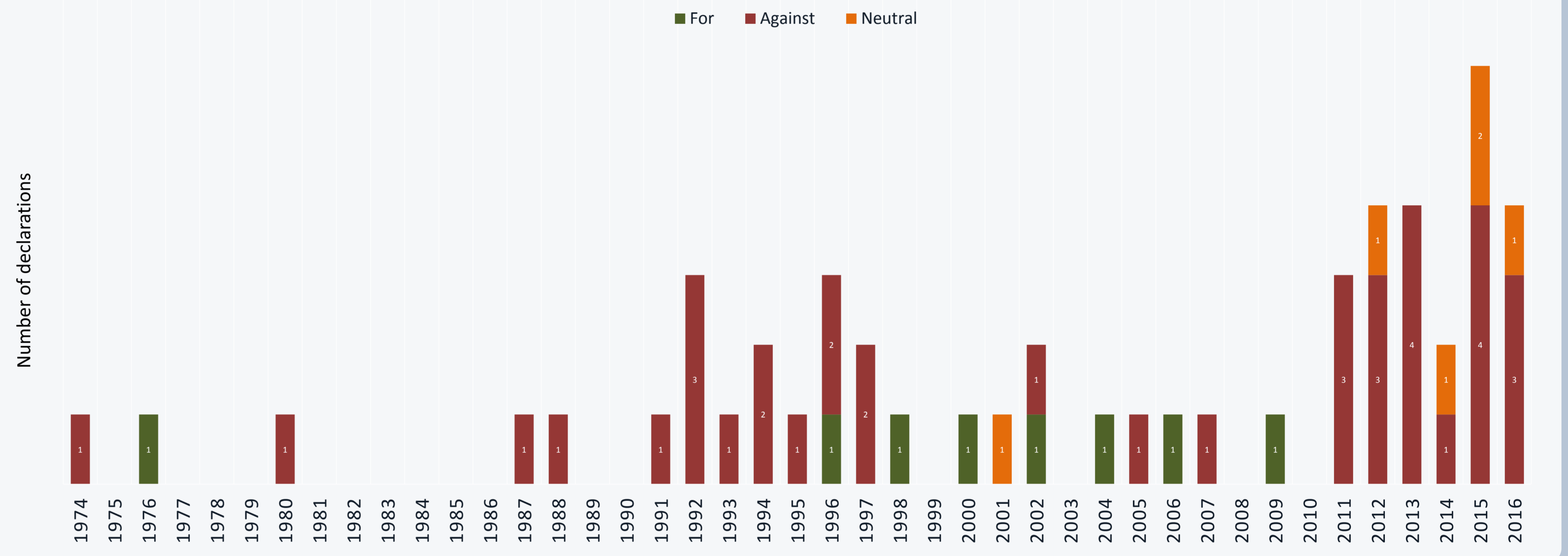
Organisations involved



12 Palliative care organisations issued Euthanasia/assisted dying declarations

Discussion and Conclusions

- The value of palliative care in eliminating suffering at the end of life is recognised in the declarations, whether or not they support assisted dying/euthanasia.
- Despite divided opinions, 'palliative care' forms a significant part of the discussion on legalising assisted dying/euthanasia
- Declarations *against* legalising AD/E regard PC as a solution for AD/E requests and offering dignity at the end of life, and those *for* demand legalising AD/E on the grounds of dignity facilitated by 'autonomy' and suffering that cannot be relieved through PC



References to palliative care

- 41/ Assisted dying/euthanasia (AD/E) declarations made reference to palliative care (PC)

Importance of palliative care

- PC is the only way for promoting life and death with dignity
- PC is the best approach to uphold the worth of the human person at the end of life
- Availability of quality PC will minimise requests for AD/E

Relationship of AD/E to palliative care

- AD/E is contrary to the philosophy of palliative care and should not become part of it
- There will be need for AD/E if proper palliative and elderly care was guaranteed
- Excellent PC should not exclude the right to choose assisted dying

Call for action to promote palliative care

- To ensure high quality PC access and availability for all
- To listen to the voice of PC experts while discussing legalisation of euthanasia
- Palliative care should be adequately resourced and its education should be widely promoted

Commitment to palliative care

- To make access to PC a priority
- To assist the public in acquiring a better understanding of PC
- To help reframe end-of-life care communication to avoid inflammatory language (i.e. "pull the plug")

Implications for palliative care

- Legalising AD/E will shift focus from improving PC to providing death on demand
- PC will be more effective if the option of physician-assisted dying is offered
- All possibilities within PC should be explored before offering the option of assistance for ending life

Implications for patients

- Non-availability of PC and feeling a burden could pressurise people to end their lives
- Choosing to hasten death by self-starvation and dehydration should be accompanied by PC