

Dutch euthanasia clinic sees jump in death requests

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The Netherlands' only euthanasia clinic said on Friday there had been a 22 percent jump in people wanting help to end their lives last year compared with 2018.

The Euthanasia Expertise Centre, which helps doctors to carry out assisted death, said the 3,122 requests it received last year was "far more than expected".

The Netherlands is one of a handful of countries where [euthanasia](#) is legal and by law all Dutch people older than 12 are entitled to ask for it—but they first have to meet strict criteria.

"Every working day there are 13 people who come to us and say: 'I cannot go on any longer'. There is a great need," said clinic manager Steven Pleiter.

He said the number of requests remained stable in 2017 and 2018, but then accelerated last year.

Clinic spokeswoman Elke Swart told AFP one of the reasons for the spike could have been a court case against a doctor last year who euthanised a patient with severe dementia, "possibly scaring off doctors with similar requests who then referred their patients to our clinic".

The doctor was later acquitted on charges of having carried out the euthanasia without following strict guidelines.

The rise in 2019 could also be demographic—an [ageing population](#) that is more aware of the practice of euthanasia, Swart said.

Clinic manager Pleiter said some 900 requests to the clinic were carried out last year.

But he said the jump in euthanasia demands rang alarm bells as his clinic, based in The Hague, was battling to deal with the increase.

"We have openings on all fronts, for doctors, psychiatrists and nurses," Pleiter said.

Just over 6,000 assisted deaths were carried out across the Netherlands in 2018, according to official figures, with the Euthanasia Expertise Centre assisting in 727 cases.

The Netherlands was the first country to legalise euthanasia in 2002. It can only be carried out under strict conditions set down in Dutch law.

Children up to 16 need the permission of their parents and guardians, while parents must be involved in the process for children aged 16 and 17. From 18, any Dutch citizen may ask for assisted death.

In all cases, the patient must have "unbearable and endless suffering" and must have requested to die "earnestly and with full conviction".

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