

Euthanasia numbers in Canada skyrocket in just one year

Canada's euthanasia statistics for 2018 have shown an alarming 50 per cent rise over the previous year's figures, says Alex Schadenberg of the Euthanasia Prevention Coalition.

"We have almost caught up to the Netherlands and Belgium in a very short time," Schadenberg said in an interview. "We seem to have a complete acceptance of euthanasia in our country. What concerns me is the level of push going on to have this normalized."



Alex Schadenberg

Schadenberg was relying on figures Dalhousie University professor Jocelyn Downie presented at a Royal Society of Canada luncheon in Ottawa in March. Schadenberg had expressed concern on his blog that Downie had obtained access to euthanasia figures that Health Canada has not released yet.

According to Downie's talk, 4,235 people availed themselves of so-called Medical Aid in Dying (MAiD) in 2018, up from 2704 in 2017; and 1010 in 2016 and Dec. 2015. A total of 7949 people have had an assisted death since Dec. 10, 2015.

In an email, Downie said the figures came from data presented by Dr. Stefanie Green, president of the Canadian Association of MAiD Assessors and Providers at the Third International End of Life Law, Ethics, Policy, and Practice Conference held in Ghent, Belgium in early March.

“Yes, these numbers are as accurate as can be without having the Health Canada numbers for 2018,” said Downie. “I do not have any concerns about the rise in 2018 over the 2017 figures. That is entirely to be expected as MAiD becomes available across the country and as Canadians come to know that this is a legal option that is available to them should they meet the criteria set out in the legislation.

“It reveals nothing other than that people who meet the strict eligibility criteria are starting to have access to MAiD,” Downie said. “We remain below the percentage that I anticipate we will reach within some years and then plateau.”



Jocelyn Downie

A spokeswoman for Health Canada said the latest available MAiD figures cover the year 2017.

“The next report will encompass January to October 2018 and will be published before the end of spring,” said Maryse Durette, senior media advisor to the health minister. “I could not secure a firmer date as we’re still seeking clarifications from some provinces on some numbers.”

Taylor Hyatt, a policy analyst with the disability rights group *Toujours Vivant–Not Dead Yet* (TVNDY), attended Downie’s talk in Ottawa, and passed the data on to Schadenberg.

“In all honesty, the numbers weren’t the thing that scared me the most,” said Hyatt in an interview. When she looked more closely at the data, she saw Downie’s presentation reported “a least a couple of hundred more deaths vs. the report that Health Canada had been putting out.”

“That was alarming,” she said. “It could mean underreporting to Health Canada.”

TVNDY had done an analysis of the loopholes in the federal monitoring system for MAiD and the organization predicted “there was going to be lots of information missing or recorded incorrectly,” Hyatt said.

“We’re scared that not only are our lives at risk and more deaths are going to occur, but of the deaths that do happen, some may go unnoticed and some that break the law may go undetected,” Hyatt said.

At her Ottawa talk, Downie addressed the reports of the Council of Canadian Academies on expanding eligibility for euthanasia to those with mental illness alone; to mature minors; and to those who had signed an advance request upon receiving a dementia diagnosis.

Downie “was in favour of all three extensions,” said Hyatt. “She said she expected charter challenges moving all three forward.”

Downie also said the requirement a death be “reasonably foreseeable” is unconstitutional.

Other data Downie delivered to the talk, according to Hyatt: 99 per cent of MAiD deaths are administered by a provider who is either a physician (95 per cent) or a nurse practitioner. The average age of those obtaining euthanasia is 73; euthanasia deaths are 57 per cent more likely to take place in large urban areas, as opposed to 42 per cent in smaller areas.

Slightly more men (51 per cent) than women (49 per cent) have availed themselves of euthanasia; and cancer (64 per cent) is the most common underlying condition. Circulatory/respiratory conditions are next at 17 per cent; and neurodegenerative conditions are third at 12 per cent.