

# Right-to-die group faces Belgian inquiry over 'suicide powder' offer

1/6/19  
Gordon

**Daniel Boffey**  
Brussels

Belgian prosecutors are to investigate a right-to-die group that has been offering advice on the use of a "suicide powder". The Last Will group, which has about 23,000 paying members with an average age of 69, was blocked by the Dutch authorities last year from helping approximately 1,000 people buy the drug but continues to offer advice on legal ways to obtain it.

The prosecutor's office in east Flanders opened its investigation into the

group's activities before a meeting of its 700-strong Belgian branch in the Flemish city of Ghent on 24 June.

Prosecutors told De Morgen newspaper the inquiry was at an early stage and the initial focus was on the exact nature of the lethal substance being promoted. Euthanasia by doctors is legal in Belgium and the Netherlands when patients of sound mind are in "unbearable suffering" and have made repeated requests to die.

However, campaigners insist the need for the involvement of a doctor may inhibit those who wish to end their lives at a time of their choosing.

In September 2017, Last Will announced it had discovered a drug of "last resort" that could be legally purchased and would deliver a peaceful death, a claim that has been challenged by some who have witnessed its use.

The group was advised last March it would be breaking Dutch law if it went ahead with plans to assist about 1,000 members to kill themselves through the provision of "material help".

That advice followed a prosecutor's inquiry into the death of a 19-year-old woman who had purchased the powder online. No criminal acts were found to have taken place by Last Will.

Doctor-assisted euthanasia was legalised in 2002 in Belgium, and in 2014 it became the only country in the world to allow child euthanasia. Three children, aged nine, 11 and 17, have been euthanised. They all had conditions from which they were expected to die within a short period.

Gwendolyn Portzky, the director of the Flemish Centre for Suicide Prevention, said her organisation feared Last Will would encourage people to contemplate killing themselves.

Samaritans can be contacted on 116 123 or [jo@samaritans.org](mailto:jo@samaritans.org)