

Needs of aging Holocaust survivor population are greater than ever

Advocacy group: Despite 12,000 deaths in past year, those remaining will require higher levels of assistance

• By RUTH EGLASH

Some 12,000 victims of Nazi atrocities died over the past year and, according to data published Monday by the Foundation for the Benefit of Holocaust Victims in Israel, at least one survivor in Israel dies every hour.

Released to coincide with Holocaust Remembrance Day, which will be marked countrywide starting Wednesday night, the foundation's data highlighted the findings of a special report showing that even as the number of remaining survivors falls rapidly each year, the needs of the aging population have increased to the highest levels ever. The foundation also pointed out Monday that despite vast governmental resources for helping the survivors, many of their needs are still not being met.

The foundation's report, which is based on the findings of a survey carried out last year by the American-Jewish Joint Distribution Committee-affiliated Myers-JDC-Brookdale Institute, noted that even though the number of survivors will have dropped by more than 30 percent to 145,000 in 2015, the number of those in need of financial assistance and medical aid will have risen sharply.

Today, out of the 198,000 Holocaust survivors in Israel, the vast majority – 88% – are over 75 years old and nearly 20,000 require special home arrangements and rely on other people for their day-to-day needs.

The foundation, which provides enrichment programs and home-care services for survivors, also highlighted that roughly 98% of the survivors continue to live at home and more than 10,000 of them often express feelings of acute loneliness.

Elazar Stern, chairman of the foundation's board, said the findings were worrying and stressed that more hours of nursing care and financial grants were needed to help survivors live out their final years with dignity.

Stern also highlighted that while there are vast resources set aside by the government to help survivors, many of the benefits are not reaching those who need them.

"We will continue our work with survivors," he said of the foundation, which receives 40% of its budget from the government and the rest from the Conference for Material Claims Against Germany, "but we do not have enough resources to satisfy all the needs of the remaining survivors."

While Stern's message ahead of the annual Remembrance Day ceremonies casts a spotlight on the plight of Holocaust survivors in Israel, the Ministry of Welfare and Social Services and the Holocaust Survivors Rights Authority, a department in the Finance Ministry, both released statements Monday about their increased budgets and additional work with the population.

According to information released by the ministry, the budget for programs and services for Holocaust survivors was increased by NIS 6 million over the past year to NIS 206 million.

The ministry also said that despite discord over who is officially recognized as a Holocaust survivor, it runs a series of programs that provide support and treatment for all those who suffered at the hands of the Nazis during World War II.

The Holocaust Survivors Rights Authority announced Monday that its budget had also been increased and stands today at NIS 3 billion. It claims to work with more than 90,000 people, and over the past year has instituted programs that help survivors understand their rights and claim benefits that are owed to them.