

# **The development of a national network of 12 sexual assault centres in the Netherlands**

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## **Background**

In 2012, the first Dutch sexual assault center was opened at the University Medical Center Utrecht. Soon after, more centers opened its doors for acute victims of sexual assault. The aim of the centers is to provide 24/7 coordinated and integrated services (i.e., medical, forensic, and psychological). The public response and subsequent usage of the care provided in these centers paved the way for the establishment of more centers across the Netherlands. Nowadays, the Netherlands have a network of twelve Sexual Assault Centers.

## **Aims**

To present the development of a national network of sexual assault centers over the last four years which nowadays provide integrated and multidisciplinary care for acute victims of sexual assault in the Netherlands, according to a national and uniform protocol to ensure quality of care.

## **Methods**

The development of the national network of sexual assault Centers will be presented from various perspectives: financial, societal as well as clinical practice.

## **Results**

To date, twelve sexual assault centers in the Netherlands are operating according to national quality criteria. The website is online ([www.centrumseksueelgeweld.nl](http://www.centrumseksueelgeweld.nl)) and a free national telephone number is available 24/7. Furthermore, the implementation of a national data registration has started, which will provide an insight into the care provided and characteristics of the victims. That, in turn, can be the basis for further research, improvement of care and future policy. Lastly, a national campaign is planned for later this year to increase public and political awareness. The latter has resulted in government support and their commitment of financing the centers for the next two years.

## **Discussion**

Great progress has been made with the establishment of twelve centers across the Netherlands, the website, a national telephone number, the raising of public awareness and short-term(financial) government support. Nevertheless, various challenges lie ahead. The ongoing political discussion, the uncertainty of structural financial support and raising public awareness of the existence and accessibility of the sexual assault centers remain topics to focus on. Despite these challenges, four more centers are planned to open their doors this year.

## Conclusions

With the establishment of the sexual assault centers, the care for acute victims of sexual assault in the Netherland has improved greatly although challenges on various levels remain present.