

Westminster Hall Debate - The importance of recognising & preserving the unique value of charity-funded medical research in the upcoming Spending Review – November 2020

Contact: Jordan Clark, Public Affairs Officer - jordan.clark@alzheimers.org.uk

This briefing includes:

1. **Background**
2. **Medical research charity funding**
3. **Early career researchers**
4. **The 'Dementia Moonshot'**

1. Background

Dementia is one of the greatest healthcare challenges we face in the UK, with over 850,000 people living with the condition and a cost to the economy of £26bn per year.¹

Without life-changing treatments, the number of people living with the condition is set to grow to a million people in the next five years. Furthermore, the tragic, disproportionate impact of the pandemic on people living with dementia, who have accounted for 27% of deaths with COVID-19, has reinforced that there has never been a more critical time to invest in dementia research.

2. Medical research charity funding

Figures from the National Institute of Health Research in October show that 1,864 medical research studies (30%) are fully paused due to the pandemic² - down from 53% in August³. Whilst this drop in paused studies is encouraging, Alzheimer's Society is concerned that funding issues could impact on plans for future studies.

The Institute for Public Policy Research (IPPR) has carried out analysis which has found that the impact of COVID-19 on charity research could mean as much as £7.8 billion less funding from charitable and private investment for medical research between now and 2027.⁴

COVID-19 has caused an economic hit to AMRC charities, such as Alzheimer's Society, meaning together they have lost out on over a third of their fundraising income. Collectively, this will leave a £310 million hole in UK medical research funding⁵, risking the loss of new researchers, setting dementia research progress back and reducing the UK's capacity to tackle big health challenges, such as dementia.

Alzheimer's Society have called for the creation of a life sciences-charity partnership fund. This funding would require the government to match fund biomedical charity spend for 3 years, commencing with a commitment in this Comprehensive Spending Review to an initial £310m for the year 2021/22. Alzheimer's Society believes doing this would ensure that the UK maintains its position as a world leader in biomedical research.

The challenges the country has faced during the course of the pandemic around testing capacity and new treatments also highlight how important a strong life sciences sector is to the UK's biosecurity.

3. Early career researchers

Alzheimer's Society have consistently supported early career researchers through fellowships and grants. Alzheimer's Society are concerned that there is a risk that research will not be deemed as an attractive field in which early-career researchers would start their career. 90% of Alzheimer's Society funded researchers have told us they are concerned about the future of dementia research.⁶

¹ <https://www.alzheimers.org.uk/about-us/policy-and-influencing/dementia-scale-impact-numbers>

² <https://www.nihr.ac.uk/news/nihr-issues-fourth-update-on-implementation-of-the-restart-framework/25896>

³ https://www.nihr.ac.uk/news/nihr-shares-two-month-update-on-implementation-of-the-restart-framework/25398?utm_source=newsletter-nr&

⁴ <https://www.ippr.org/files/2020-10/research-at-risk-oct20.pdf>

⁵ <https://www.amrc.org.uk/blog/articulating-the-economic-value-of-charity-funded-research>

⁶ <https://www.alzheimers.org.uk/news/2020-06-24/alzheimers-society-comments-impact-coronavirus-medical-research-funding>

Alzheimer's Research UK and Alzheimer's Society expect to jointly receive almost 400 research proposals each year, many of which are from early-career researchers, but without government support, the financial pressures caused by COVID-19 will mean these charities are unable to support any new funding opportunities for early-career research in 2020/21.

Four-in-10 charity-funded early career scientists have considered leaving research due to funding concerns since the coronavirus hit the UK, according to a survey by the Association of Medical Research Charities.⁷

Medical research charities fund the salaries of around 17,000 UK scientists.⁸ Funding uncertainties mean many could be forced to leave the profession, with two thirds of those surveyed relying entirely on charity funding for their salary.

Alzheimer's Society is calling on the government to deliver on their commitment to implement a Dementia Moonshot in the upcoming Comprehensive Spending Review – doubling dementia research funding over the next 10 years.

4. The 'Dementia Moonshot'

Covid has demonstrated how vital the life sciences sector is for the UK. This is not just an investment in dementia, but life sciences overall, and with 36 million people worldwide having dementia and that number increasing all the time, there's huge scope here for the UK to be a world-leader on the issue.

Alzheimer's Society welcomed the commitment in the Conservative 2019 General Election manifesto, which committed to double government funding for dementia research to £160m over the next 10 years.

Alzheimer's Society would like to see the government implement this commitment through the upcoming Comprehensive Spending Review.

Alzheimer's Society has 3 priorities for the use of Dementia Moonshot funding:

1. **A National Network of Excellence in Dementia Care Research – Alzheimer's Society are calling for funding to create a national joined-up effort on dementia care, that will consolidate the currently dispersed expertise into a national force in the way that the UK Dementia Research Institute has enabled innovative laboratory research.** The UK is world leading in social care research and can continue to develop life-changing new models of care and support.
2. **Transforming care through technology for people with dementia – Alzheimer's Society believes that technology creates an opportunity to increase the independence of people with dementia, better support carers and keep people out of hospitals and care homes for as long as possible. However, the evidence base on the effectiveness of such approaches is still limited. The routes to develop, test and scale technologies are not clearly mapped out and funding is scarce. **The creation of a 'Dementia Challenge prize' as part of a 'Technology Discovery Fund', can propel the UK to the forefront of technology for dementia with associated economic gains.****
3. **Public health and prevention research – Alzheimer's Society believes that it is important that the UK continues to fund population-level research, a field in which the UK has been a world leader. Given the scale of dementia, **Alzheimer's Society is calling for the establishment of a national observatory for dementia and cognitive impairment.** This would develop local and national strategies to reduce the risk of people developing dementia and could have a significant impact on future cases of dementia, with potentially hundreds of thousands fewer cases and national savings in the range of billions.**

⁷ <https://www.amrc.org.uk/News/pandemic-threatens-future-of-research-as-early-career-scientists-look-to-leave>

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