

**Alzheimer's Society Paper Launch: 'Moving Forward Stronger: Addressing COVID-19 Deterioration in People with Long-Term Conditions'**

**23 June 2021, 2pm-3pm - Zoom**

For more information or to submit questions in advance, please contact Alex Osborne at [alex.osborne@alzheimers.org.uk](mailto:alex.osborne@alzheimers.org.uk). This briefing includes:

- 1. Key Messages**
- 2. Deterioration during the pandemic**
- 3. Dementia and Rehabilitation**

**1. Key Messages**

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- During the COVID-19 pandemic, **many people with pre-existing, long-term conditions have seen their conditions deteriorate at a much faster pace than usual** due to the effects of lockdown, social isolation, and the suspension or closure of rehabilitative services.
- **82% of people with dementia surveyed by Alzheimer's Society reported a deterioration in symptoms since the start of the pandemic.**<sup>1</sup>
- People with dementia rely on rehabilitation services to maintain their abilities for as long as possible. **Providing the right rehabilitation as we move on from the pandemic could help slow down or prevent further deterioration in people with dementia's conditions.**
- **In order to properly address this deterioration, a fully-funded national rehabilitation strategy is needed**, which should be overseen by a national clinical lead.

**2. Deterioration during the pandemic**

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The COVID-19 pandemic has been devastating, with over 150,000 people losing their lives to the virus in the UK.<sup>2</sup>

**From when the pandemic began, staff and resources were diverted to hospitals to prioritise COVID-19 patients, meaning staff working in community rehabilitation services were redeployed to acute services.**<sup>3</sup> Meanwhile, community services were primarily offering limited virtual support.

These services are vital to the management of long-term health conditions, and as such, **many people with pre-existing, long-term health conditions have experienced more rapid deterioration in their condition during the pandemic.** This deterioration has been exacerbated by the impact of repeated lockdowns and reduced social contact.

**The right rehabilitation makes it possible for people to manage their long-term health conditions effectively, and as a result, can help slow down or prevent deterioration.** For some, it may even reverse some of the deterioration people have experienced, and help people to regain some abilities.

**This will only be possible, however, if there is a clear strategy and direction on rehabilitation as we move on from the COVID-19 pandemic.** Such a strategy will be essential to ensure the hundreds of thousands of people living with long-term conditions in the UK have the tailored support they need.

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<sup>1</sup> Alzheimer's Society. Lockdown isolation causes shocking levels of decline for people with dementia. 2020. <https://www.alzheimers.org.uk/news/2020-07-30/lockdown-isolation-causes-shocking-levels-decline-people-dementia-who-are-rapidly>.

<sup>2</sup> UK Government. Coronavirus in the UK: deaths in United Kingdom. 2021. <https://coronavirus.data.gov.uk/details/deaths>.

<sup>3</sup> Health Europa. Call for UK Government to protect rehabilitation services during Covid-19. 2020. <https://www.healtheuropa.eu/call-for-uk-government-to-protect-rehabilitation-services-during-covid-19/104067/>.

### 3. Dementia and Rehabilitation

**The 850,000 people living with dementia in the UK have been worst hit by COVID-19.** During the first wave of the pandemic, **people with dementia accounted for more than a quarter of all COVID-19 related deaths in England and Wales.**<sup>4</sup>

While dementia is a progressive condition, meaning it always gets worse over time, the rate of its deterioration has significantly increased since the pandemic began. **An Alzheimer's Society survey on the effects of lockdown for people with dementia found that 82% of people reported a deterioration in their symptoms, while 45% of people reported that lockdown had a negative impact on their mental health.**<sup>5</sup>

This increased rate of deterioration for people with dementia has occurred for a number of reasons, including **changes to community rehabilitation services, a lack of social contact, and reductions in referrals to memory services and frequency of care plan reviews.**<sup>6</sup>

**As dementia is a complex neurological condition, a person with dementia will require a range of community rehabilitation services to maintain their abilities for as long as possible.** Services that were not suspended typically moved online during the pandemic, posing challenges for people with dementia who may not be confident or comfortable using digital methods to access services. **Social contact is also vital for people with dementia, as it ensures they can practice and maintain their use of cognitive and communication skills.**

**From February to June 2020, dementia diagnosis rates dropped from 67.6% to 63.5%.<sup>7</sup>** This means that more people with dementia are living without access to emotional, practical, legal, and financial advice, as well as the specialist support services they need to manage their condition.

In order to ensure people with dementia can counteract some of the deterioration they've experienced during the pandemic, **a rehabilitation strategy must provide them with substantial intervention and ongoing support from professionals in secondary and community care.**

It must also consider the needs of informal carers, who are an essential part of people with dementia's rehabilitation, and draw together necessary leadership and resources that can be complemented by plans developed by local authorities which are tailored to the needs of their communities.

Collectively, we as a group of organisations contributing to and/or supporting the report make the following calls to national and local Government:

- ✓ **Fully-fund a national two-year rehabilitation strategy that ensures people who have seen significant deterioration of their long-term conditions have the therapeutic support they need.**
- ✓ **Appoint a national clinical lead to implement this rehabilitation strategy.**
- ✓ **Local partners (e.g. local authorities/Integrated Care Systems) to develop and deliver their own localised rehabilitation strategy, and each ICS to have a regional rehabilitation lead.**

<sup>4</sup> Office for National Statistics. Deaths involving Covid-19, England and Wales. 2020. [Deaths involving COVID-19, England and Wales - Office for National Statistics \(ons.gov.uk\)](https://www.ons.gov.uk).

<sup>5</sup> Alzheimer's Society. Lockdown isolation causes shocking levels of decline for people with dementia. 2020. <https://www.alzheimers.org.uk/news/2020-07-30/lockdown-isolation-causes-shocking-levels-decline-people-dementia-who-are-rapidly>.

<sup>6</sup> NHS Digital. Recorded Dementia Diagnoses. 2020. <https://digital.nhs.uk/data-and-information/publications/statistical/recorded-dementia-diagnoses>.

<sup>7</sup> Alzheimer's Society. Alzheimer's Society comment on how coronavirus is affecting dementia assessment and diagnosis. 2020. <https://www.alzheimers.org.uk/news/2020-08-10/coronavirus-affecting-dementia-assessment-diagnosis>.