

General Debate – Dementia research in the UK – 10th February

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This briefing includes:

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1. Suggested interventions

- *The Government has previously said that plans for dementia research will be included in the National Dementia Strategy. Can the Minister set out when this is likely to be delivered?*
- *I understand that the Join Dementia Research (JDR) resource is piloting actively writing to all people with dementia after their diagnosis to invite them to participate in research. This would hugely benefit dementia research and ensure that the voices of people living with dementia are at its heart. What steps will the Government take to support JDR with this pilot and to help roll it out across the four nations?*
- *New and exciting technologies that will transform the way people with dementia are diagnosed, such as blood biomarkers, are coming down the line. What steps are being taken now to ensure that we're ready for such technologies, and that those living with dementia across the UK will be able to access them?*
- *There are over 100 types of dementia. While over 50% of people with dementia will have Alzheimer's disease specifically, the support someone needs can depend on the type of dementia they have. How can the Government support improvements in dementia sub-type diagnosis?*
- *Researchers in the earlier stages of their career have been heavily impacted by the effects of the pandemic, particularly by the lockdowns and closures of labs. What further support can the Government give these researchers to ensure that we not only attract the brightest and best to conduct research in the UK, but also retain those already here?*
- *Getting funding for Research and Development into regions beyond the South East was a core mission of the Government's recently published 'Levelling Up White Paper'. Alzheimer's Society fund 'Centres of Excellence' in Exeter and Newcastle, which bring together leading academics to conduct research on how people with dementia can be best cared for. Has the Government considered using this model to develop and expand new Centres of Excellence across the UK?*

2. Background

There are an estimated 900,000 people living with dementia in the UK.¹ Dementia is a progressive, long-term health condition with huge care costs attached. It has been estimated that 70% of care home residents and over 60% of home care recipients are people with dementia.²

At the 2019 General Election, the Conservative Party made a commitment to bring forward a 'Dementia Moonshot' and "double dementia research funding over the next decade". This would increase funding for dementia research to £166m a year – meaning an extra £800m for dementia research over the next 10 years.³

3. Current state of dementia research in the UK

Dementia will only be cured with research. The UK has taken great steps over the past 10-15 years to improve the dementia research landscape in the UK, but without further investment now, these developments are at risk of being wasted.

Dementia research and the economy - Between 2010 and 2018, government funding for dementia research increased from £28.2m to £82.5m. Despite this welcome increase, dementia research remains relatively

¹ Wittenberg, Raphael et al. Projections of older people with dementia and costs of dementia care in the United Kingdom, 2019-2040. 2019. Care Policy and Evaluation Centre, London School of Economics and Political Science. <https://www.alzheimers.org.uk/sites/default/files/2019-11/110319c-report-november-2019.pdf>.

² Alzheimer's Society. Dementia UK. Update. 2014. https://www.alzheimers.org.uk/sites/default/files/migrate/downloads/dementia_uk_update.pdf.

³ Conservative Party Manifesto. 2019. <https://www.conservatives.com/our-plan>

underfunded when compared to other conditions. For example, government research funding for cancer is almost 3 times higher than that for dementia – despite dementia being the UK's leading cause of death.⁴

Government spending on research can also act as a catalyst to unlock further private funding. A study conducted by Oxford Economics in September 2020 found that each £1 of public research and development funding stimulates between £1.96 and £2.34 of private investment over the next 15 years.⁵ On this basis, an extra 'Moonshot' investment of £800m over the next decade, as promised by government, could unlock additional private investment of £1.6bn – £1.8bn.

Impacts of the pandemic on dementia research - Throughout the pandemic, many laboratories have had to be closed and/or have had their research suspended. The inability to access labs affected many projects and has heavily impacted on research productivity. Preparations for research, including the development of cell structures and waiting for animals to reach the appropriate levels of maturity for testing, can take many months. The sudden impact of the pandemic put many of these investigations on indefinite hold.

The pandemic has had a devastating effect on the financial landscape of dementia research. Medical research charities, who fund 51% of all medical research in the UK, have seen their ability to fundraise drastically reduced.⁶ A survey from Alzheimer's Society, conducted in April 2021, found that 85% of researchers reported that the pandemic has led to fewer funding opportunities being available to them.⁷

4. APPG on Dementia report: *Fuelling the Moonshot*

Last year, as the Government was yet to provide a timetable for when the Moonshot funding might be delivered, the APPG on Dementia decided to hold an inquiry into the current state of dementia research in the UK and investigate how this funding could be best used to support the field.

The resulting report, [Fuelling the Moonshot: Unleashing the UK's potential through dementia research](#), made a central recommendation that the Government should bring forward the Dementia Moonshot funding as soon as possible. However, the APPG also developed several further recommendations on what this extra funding could be used to support the field. These include:

- Moonshot funding should be directed towards development of novel methods for early diagnosis, such as blood and other biomarkers for different types of dementia.
- Funding for the UK Dementia Research Institute should be confirmed for the next 10 years.
- Building on Alzheimer's Society's Centres of Excellence model, 3 new centres should be established which focus on some of the biggest challenges in dementia.
- The Moonshot should be used to establish a specific fund of £40m to support both clinical and preclinical postdoctoral research positions and talent retention in dementia research.
- The Office for Health Improvement and Disparities launches public information campaigns to explain how the public can take steps to reduce their dementia risk.

5. Alzheimer's Society supported research

Alzheimer's Society currently supports and funds dementia research across the UK. This includes the funding of Centres of Excellence, which bring together top researchers to address the urgent need for more research into dementia care. The Centres of Excellence are currently based in Newcastle, Exeter, and London. Alzheimer's Society believes that this successful model could be replicated effectively and provides an opportunity to level up in academic institutions across the UK.

Nearly 30% of disease modifying treatments in phase III trials for Alzheimer's disease across the globe, are based on research funded by the Alzheimer's Society, with Professor John Hardy's pivotal discovery of the first 'Alzheimer's gene' in 1991. This work provided the first strong evidence that aggregated amyloid was a cause of Alzheimer's disease (the 'amyloid cascade hypothesis'), a finding that has influenced the field ever since.

⁴ Alzheimer's Research UK (2019). Deaths due to dementia. [Online] Available at <https://www.dementiastatistics.org/statistics/deaths-due-to-dementia/>

⁵ Department of Business Energy & Industrial Strategy (2021). The relationship between public and private R&D funding. [Online] Available at [Research and development: relationship between public and private funding - GOV.UK \(www.gov.uk\)](https://www.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/978482/research-and-development-relationship-between-public-and-private-funding-GOV.UK.pdf)

⁶ Association of Medical Research Charities (2020). Covid-19 impacts on medical research charities. [Online] Available at <https://www.amrc.org.uk/Covid-19-the-risk-to-amrc-charities>

⁷ Alzheimer's Society 2021 Survey into funding opportunities for researchers post pandemic