

For more information from Alzheimer's Society, please contact Martin Reilly, National Influencing Officer (Northern Ireland) at martin.reilly@alzheimers.org.uk / 07591 588293. We are happy to arrange meetings to discuss this briefing further.

1. Key Messages

- There are currently **over 22,000 people living with dementia in Northern Ireland** – a figure that's set to rise to nearly 43,000 by 2040.¹ Dementia is one of the biggest challenges facing our health and social care system.
- In April 2023, the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland published a statement on a 2023/24 Budget which is now subject to Parliamentary approval.² **This only allocated £7.3bn to Health and Social Care, the same figure as for the preceding year, meaning inflationary pressures such as pay have not been accounted for.**
- **We need a stable Government issuing a multiyear budget for Northern Ireland, with specific financial commitments to progress both the Regional Dementia Care Pathway and social care reform.** Without this, essential health and social care services in Northern Ireland are at risk, and efforts to transform the system are halted.
- It's been 5 years since the publication of the Regional Dementia Care Pathway which set out a vision for high-quality dementia care in Northern Ireland, yet it has not been fully funded or implemented.³ **People living with dementia have waited long enough - the Regional Dementia Care Pathway must be delivered along with appropriate funding as a matter of urgency.** This must be prioritised in any multiyear budget. Previous estimates indicate implementation of the Regional Dementia Care Pathway would cost around £12m.
- Last year, the then-Minister for Health, Robin Swann MLA, ran a consultation on the Department's recommendations for the reform of adult social care which closed in June 2022.⁴ **We need to see the outcome of this consultation published without further delay, alongside a clear implementation plan to transform the social care system in Northern Ireland.**

2. Background

Dementia is the biggest health and social care challenge facing the UK right now. 900,000 people live with dementia in the UK – a figure that's set to rise to 1.6m by 2040.⁵ **In Northern Ireland, over 22,000 people currently live with dementia, which will rise to nearly 43,000 people by 2040.**⁶ Of the world's top ten killers, dementia is the only condition that can't be cured, stopped, or even slowed down.

Northern Ireland is projected to have the largest increase in the number of people living with dementia across the UK by 2040. This is because **the size of the older population in Northern Ireland is expected to increase much faster than the rest of the UK.**⁷

About **a third of people living with dementia in Northern Ireland are undiagnosed**, meaning they are unable to access vital care and support. The rising

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/cpec_report_november_2019.pdf.

² UK Parliament. NI Finances 2023-24 Statement by Chris Heaton-Harris MP, Secretary of State for Northern Ireland. 27 April 2023. <https://questions-statements.parliament.uk/written-statements/detail/2023-04-27/hcws748>.

³ Northern Ireland Executive Health and Social Care Board. Regional Dementia Care Pathway: Supporting Each Person's Individual Journey. March 2018. <https://online.hscni.net/dementia/>.

⁴ Northern Ireland Department of Health. Consultation on the Reform of Adult Social Care. January 2022. <https://www.health-ni.gov.uk/consultations/consultation-reform-adult-social-care>.

⁵ Wittenberg, Raphael et al. Projections of older people with dementia. 2019.

⁶ Ibid.

⁷ Ibid.

prevalence of dementia demonstrates the urgent need for the Northern Ireland budget to provide funding for the implementation of the Regional Dementia Care Pathway and wider social care reform.

3. Making Dementia a Priority in Northern Ireland

In April 2023, the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland published a statement outlining a Budget for Northern Ireland to be approved by Parliament on 10 May 2023. **This allocated £7.3bn to Health and Social Care, replicating last year's allocation. This represents a flat cash settlement which does not account for inflationary pressures such as pay.**

The lack of a multi-year budget for Northern Ireland is putting vital health and social care services at risk. Not only does this prevent the much-needed transformation of services, it also **means the 22,000 people living with dementia in Northern Ireland face cuts to essential care and support.** Alzheimer's Society is **deeply concerned by the Department of Health in Northern Ireland's briefing on its financial situation**, which indicates a shortfall of £300m in funding. Proposals for reductions in nursing and residential care placements, and the restriction and potential charging for domiciliary care packages, will have **a significant and disproportionate impact on people living with dementia**, many of whom rely on these services.

With no current cure for dementia, quality social care is a lifeline. People affected by dementia draw on care to manage their symptoms, access practical support with daily activities such as feeding, washing, and dressing, and enable them to maintain relationships and connections.

In the UK, around 40% of people with dementia live in a care or nursing home, and around 60% of people drawing on domiciliary care have dementia.⁸ People living with dementia are among the largest users of domiciliary and care home services.

This is why it is vital that dementia is prioritised in the Northern Ireland budget, with funding provided to implement the Regional Dementia Care Pathway as soon as possible. Estimates from 2018/19 indicate that this would cost around £12m.⁹

Social care services are severely overstretched and unable to deliver accessible, affordable, high-quality and personalised care for people with dementia. **Further cuts will leave people living with dementia even more isolated in the community, leading to crisis and avoidable hospital admissions.**

This modest and long overdue investment in the Regional Dementia Care Pathway would prevent people from reaching crisis point, reducing pressure on health services and saving time, resource, and funding as a result. The Pathway was also co-produced with people living with dementia and so, along with a package of social care reform based on Northern Ireland consultation results, is best placed to deliver the kind of care and support people want and need.

⁸ UK Homecare Association. Dementia and Homecare: Driving Quality Innovation. 2015.

<https://www.housinglin.org.uk/assets/Resources/Housing/OtherOrganisation/DementiaHomecareDrivingQualityInnovation2015.pdf>.

⁹ Response to Assembly AQW 30222/17-22 tabled by Colin McGrath MLA. 2022.

<https://aims.niassembly.gov.uk/terms/PrintResults.aspx?se=&so=Ascending&tb=&per=&sp=&fd=&td=&cb1=&cb2=&itn1=KmBY6kf5f84=&itn2=ic7icOHu4kg=&itn3=ic7icOHu4kg=&pid=4&pm=&pg=2&tn=1&ito2=&ito3=&ks=ic7icOHu4kg=&st=1&pi=0&m=0&mn=All%20Questions>.