

Alzheimer's Society briefing- King's Speech debates on Health and Social Care

Dementia is the UK's biggest killer and the largest health and social care challenge we face in this country. With one in three people born today set to develop dementia in their lifetimes, it is more pressing than ever that dementia is made a political priority.

This briefing contains suggested interventions and key messaging on:

1. Health and Dementia Diagnosis
2. Social Care
3. The Major Conditions Strategy

If you would like more information about dementia or any local statistics, please contact public.affairs@alzheimers.org.uk

1. Health and Dementia Diagnosis

Suggested interventions:

- “With the Government’s proposed reforms to the MHRA, we now have the prospect that cutting-edge medicines will be available in the UK much more quickly than previously. Drugs like lecanemab and donanemab – the first drugs which are proven to slow down the progression of Alzheimer’s disease. But if drugs are coming more quickly, the NHS also needs to be prepared for that change. **What steps is the Government taking to prepare the NHS to deliver ground-breaking treatments such as those I mentioned for dementia?”**
- “There are more than a quarter of a million people living with dementia who are undiagnosed in England alone. Part of the problem is a lack of MRI and CT scanning capacity in the memory assessment pathway, and lack of PET scanners for accurate diagnosis of dementia subtypes. We have one of the lowest per capita ratios of these scanners in the OECD – behind Russia, Slovakia, and Chile. **What steps is the Government taking to invest in diagnostic infrastructure for dementia?”**

Key messaging:

- **Dementia is the UK’s biggest killer**, according to the ONS, with **1 in 3 people born today set to develop dementia in their lifetimes.**
- **There are more than 900,000 people with dementia in the UK today**, rising to 1.6 million by 2040.
- **Dementia costs the UK economy £36.7bn per year. This will rise to £94.1bn by 2040.**
- More than a third of people with dementia in England and Northern Ireland do not have access to a diagnosis and the vital care and support it unlocks. In Wales it is around a half.
- In January 2020, the dementia diagnosis rate in England was 67.6%. The rate fell during the pandemic and has yet to recover. This needs to be an urgent system priority.
- Getting a diagnosis can be daunting, but the sooner people receive one the sooner they can plan for the future and gain access to treatment, care, and support. **91% of people Alzheimer’s Society surveyed (in 2022) said they benefitted from getting a dementia diagnosis.**
- **In the last 12 months, we have seen two effective disease-modifying treatments for Alzheimer’s disease, lecanemab and donanemab, announced.** These drugs will be the first ever treatments for the underlying cause of dementia if, and when, they are approved and commissioned in this country.

- Currently, however, the UK is not in a position to benefit from these ground-breaking new treatments, with many people living with dementia either without a diagnosis, or without being told what subtype of dementia they have (e.g. a diagnosis of Alzheimer's disease rather than just dementia).
- Lecanemab and donanemab require an early diagnosis of Alzheimer's disease, including confirmation of the presence of amyloid proteins using a PET scan or cerebrospinal fluid test. **Only 2.2% of people receive these tests in the diagnosis process.**

2. Social Care

Suggested intervention:

- “We will not fix the problems with our healthcare system without concerted social care reform, including workforce planning. Nowhere is this clearer than in dementia. People with dementia occupy a quarter of hospital beds and make up 70% of residents of care homes in England. We need a high-quality, well trained social care workforce to ensure that those people can be provided with personalised care outside hospital, in a setting more appropriate to their needs. **Last year, the Chancellor used the Autumn Statement to announce a long-term workforce strategy for the NHS. Will the Government announce an equivalent strategy for the social care sector in this year's Statement later this month?**”

Key messaging:

- With no current cure for dementia, quality social care is a lifeline to people with dementia and their families, with many people drawing on care to manage their symptoms. However, the current social care system is not set up properly to deliver care that meets the needs of people living with dementia.
- **Around 60% of people drawing on care at home have dementia and 70% of residents of older age care homes in England have dementia.**
- **An individual with dementia spends an average of around £100,000 on their care over their lifetime.** We need to move towards a new way of approaching care for future generations; a system that funds social care on the same basis as the NHS by sharing risk. We would also like to see long-term sustainable investment across the sector.
- **We need to see a comprehensive, long-term social care workforce strategy,** that delivers a trained workforce with knowledge of dementia-specific needs and the skills to provide personalised care. At the moment, only 45% of care staff are recorded as having any level of training in dementia.
- **Unpaid carers of people with dementia provide care to a value of £14.6bn a year across the UK, which is projected to increase to £35.7bn by 2040.** However, they too often lack the support they need. We would like to see carers able to access a proper annual assessment of their needs and be supported to manage their own wellbeing through dementia-specific respite care.

3. The Major Conditions Strategy

Suggested intervention:

- “A survey by Alzheimer's Society found that three in five people living with dementia do not feel supported by the health and social care system to cope with their or their loved one's diagnosis

and to manage the condition. **Will the Government commit to using the Major Conditions Strategy to deliver an improved pathway for people living with dementia navigating the health and care system, to ensure that everyone with the condition can receive the care and support they deserve?"**

Key messaging:

- The Government's Major Conditions Strategy provides an opportunity to bring forward a bold, ambitious, and deliverable plan for dementia.
- Earlier this year, 36,000 people signed Alzheimer's Society's open letter to the Secretary of State for Health and Social Care supporting our priorities for the Major Conditions Strategy:
 - **Drive** forward the improvement of dementia diagnosis rates through a funded plan
 - **Develop** strategies to support diagnosis methods and deliver access to breakthrough treatments as soon as they become available
 - **Deliver** an improved pathway for people living with dementia navigating the health and social care system
 - **Demonstrate** how data has underpinned the delivery of the Major Conditions Strategy
- Dementia is an urgent, whole-system priority and it needs a strategic response, whether a bespoke strategy for dementia or a collective strategy with other leading causes of death. It is essential that the Major Conditions Strategy is delivered, quickly, and with commensurate funding.