



## Maximising the Dementia Research Moonshot Alzheimer's Society Briefing

19 March 2021

The current government has pledged to double dementia research funding in their 2019 General Election manifesto to over £160m a year by 2030, through the delivery of a Dementia Moonshot. Dementia remains the greatest healthcare challenge facing our economy and is likely to remain so for the next generation, unless action is taken now to tackle it.

Alzheimer's Society strongly welcomes the commitment to significant additional investment in dementia research and calls on the Government to commit to their pledge. This ambitious plan will move us closer towards a cure or new treatments for Alzheimer's disease and other forms of dementia.

### Accelerating progress

Since 2013 government has increased investment, including the establishment of a national Dementia Research Institute in partnership with Alzheimer's Society and Alzheimer's Research UK. The last decade of investment in dementia research has built a foundation that is primed for accelerating progress in understanding dementia.

### Striking the balance: Care and cure

**A Dementia Moonshot must prioritise research to establish how to support people with dementia now and those who care for them to live better with the condition, as well as take steps towards developing new treatments and ultimately a cure.**

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### The Government's priorities for the Dementia Moonshot

Alzheimer's Society has established five priorities where the Government's Dementia Moonshot investment can make the biggest difference for people affected by dementia, now and in the future:

#### 1. Training the dementia researchers of the future

Medical research charities are key to supporting early career researchers, but they have been hit hard by the pandemic and anticipate on average a 40% fall in research investment this year – delaying the development of new treatments and better care. Nearly 80% of Alzheimer's Society funded researchers said they were concerned about a lack of future career opportunities in the field. There is a real risk of a lost generation of researchers which dementia research simply cannot afford. We must ensure we continue to build capacity across dementia in basic, clinical and care research and propose setting a challenge of training 500 new dementia researchers by 2030.

#### 2. Research to ensure the early detection and diagnosis of dementia

Perhaps the greatest challenge facing research to develop new treatments for dementia is the lack of simple, accurate diagnostic tests to identify those at risk at the very earliest stages. Progress towards a blood-based test for Alzheimer's disease has moved at pace. To ensure people affected by dementia feel the benefits of this pioneering work, we must see renewed funding for research to fully validated a new diagnostic test and develop a mechanism to ensure that it can then be rolled out into the clinic. This will empower people with dementia to access the support they need and ensure they can be enrolled into clinical trials for new treatments when they might be most effective. A diagnostic test will ensure the research community can test the right drugs, on the right people at the right time.

### **3. Transforming care through technology for people with dementia**

Using novel technology has tremendous 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 woefully limited. The routes to develop, test and scale technologies are not clearly mapped out and funding is scarce. The creation of a 'Longitudinal prize for dementia' alongside Nesta as part of a 'Technology Discovery Fund', can propel the UK to the forefront of technology for dementia with associated economic gains.

### **4. Making research a reality through Centres of Excellence in Dementia Research**

Alzheimer's Society's Centres of Excellence in care research have been integral to understanding what the best dementia care looks like both before and during the COVID-19 pandemic. This infrastructure and density of expertise has demonstrated real impact for people affected by dementia. The Moonshot funding should expand this highly successful model of 'Centre of Excellence' in key areas of dementia research and ensure that findings from these centres are implemented into practise or progressed to accelerate progress towards new treatments.

### **5. Understanding the underlying causes to find a cure – Additional funding for the UK Dementia Research Institute**

Since 2016, investment in the UKDRI has created a global flagship institute to discover the causes of dementia, aiming to set out paths for new treatments and cures. Alzheimer's Society and Alzheimer's Research UK as founding partners have pledge to continue to provide financial support to the institute going forward. Current Government funding runs up to 2023, when progress will be reviewed by UKRI. So we must see additional funding fundamental brain research to understanding the causes of dementia and move us towards new targeted treatments.

### **Looking forward**

These ambitious plans address the diagnosis, treatment, prevention and care of dementia and have the potential to impact the disease at all stages.

A focus on dementia research must be accompanied with a commitment to a long-term, correctly funded solution to social care as well in order to most benefit people with dementia. Investing in dementia research will be an essential part of the solution to reducing the demands on health and social care system and ensuring money is spent on the most effective possible treatments and care interventions.

Increased investment in dementia research and the Dementia Moonshot have the potential to revolutionise the diagnosis, treatment and care of dementia for future generations.

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