TIPPING POINT: OUR MANIFESTO FOR THE FUTURE OF DEMENTIA
Alzheimer’s Research UK is the leading dementia research charity in the UK working to revolutionise the way we treat, diagnose and prevent dementia.

Nearly a million people in the UK live with dementia, a number that continues to grow. If nothing changes, one in two of us will have our lives impacted by dementia, either as a carer or by developing the condition ourselves or both. Dementia has a devastating impact – it is the leading cause of death in the UK, costs the economy £42 bn per year and is the most feared condition for people over 50. It will soon become the UK’s most costly health condition – overtaking cancer and heart disease.

But we are at a tipping point. The first treatments that can slow the progression of Alzheimer’s disease are already available in the USA and Japan and are being considered by regulators in Great Britain. New blood tests which can help diagnose Alzheimer’s disease are showing promise. There are real opportunities to improve the health and wealth of the nation, ready to be unlocked. This means revolutionising the way we detect and diagnose the diseases that cause dementia, investing in prevention and providing access to new treatments whilst laying the groundwork for future breakthroughs by supporting dementia research.

Political prioritisation is vital to achieving this. Alzheimer’s Research UK is calling for all political parties to adopt the recommendations in this manifesto. Only through ambitious government action can we realise the potential for transformational change and build a future free from the harm and heartbreak caused by dementia.

**RECOMMENDATIONS**

Research is our best chance of stopping dementia in its tracks. Recent investments are advancing our understanding of the diseases that cause dementia and how to diagnose and treat them more effectively. These breakthroughs need to progress from labs into routine healthcare so that people who can benefit from them do. To achieve this, all political parties should include the following actions in their party’s manifesto:

1. Grow long-term funding for dementia research and back the Dame Barbara Windsor Dementia Mission.
2. Protect lifelong brain health with a cross governmental strategy for the prevention of ill health.
3. Develop more accessible routes to dementia diagnosis, treatment, and research, by investing in emerging healthcare models such as Brain Health Clinics.
4. Enable NHS patients to be among the first in the world to benefit from cutting-edge dementia treatments.
5. Drive earlier and accurate diagnosis through investment and piloting innovation in the NHS.
FIVE AREAS WHERE ACTION IS NEEDED:

1. **Grow long-term funding for dementia research and back the Dame Barbara Windsor Dementia Mission.**

A strong environment for dementia research is essential to developing a range of treatments for everyone living with dementia. Investing in dementia clinical trials would allow people to access promising new medicines and benefit the UK economy. However, we are currently falling behind other countries. People living with dementia in the UK are less likely to be offered the opportunity to take part in research and clinical trials, both in comparison to other health conditions and to other countries.

Sustainable funding and strategic leadership are required to set the direction for research efforts, leverage healthcare data for faster trials and integrate innovation into trial delivery and regulation. The Dame Barbara Windsor Dementia Mission has been established to achieve these objectives and more work is needed to realise its full potential.

**The solution**

To establish the UK as a world leader in dementia research, the next government must set out a long-term strategic and sustainable plan for dementia research funding.

To maximise the impact of the Dame Barbara Windsor Dementia Mission and accelerate dementia research, the next government must commit to promoting the Mission and enhance the initiative within a strengthened Office of Life Sciences.

**Key facts and stats**

£35m - NHS income from delivering commercial clinical trials across all disease areas in 2019.

Between 2014 and 2023 the UK dropped from 2nd to 6th globally for the number of dementia clinical trials initiated, and now has the lowest proportion of phase 3 trial sites in the world.

2. **Protect lifelong brain health with a cross governmental strategy for the prevention of ill health.**

We know that 40% of dementia cases world-wide could be prevented or delayed. By prioritising people's brain health and addressing modifiable risk factors for dementia, such as hearing loss and high blood pressure, there is a clear opportunity to prevent dementia cases in the future.

To achieve this, health promotion must be at the heart of policymaking for governments across the UK, with national prevention of ill-health strategies developed for England, Scotland, Wales and Northern Ireland.

**The solution**

The next government must create a cross-governmental strategy for the prevention of ill health to address the health and lifestyle factors that affect our risk of developing dementia, particularly those beyond individuals' control, like air pollution and the affordability of a healthy diet. This requires an approach which reduces risk across the whole population while providing targeted interventions for the most at-risk groups.

**Key facts and stats**

£1.8bn - potential annual savings in England alone from properly implementing three targeted interventions for dementia risk reduction.
3. Develop more accessible routes to dementia diagnosis, treatment, and research, by investing in emerging healthcare models such as Brain Health Clinics.

Despite affecting nearly a million people in the UK, there is no national strategy for dementia and clinical pathways are fragmented and outdated. High-quality dementia diagnosis and treatment relies on many different parts of the health and care system working together – an approach that’s at the heart of integrated care systems.

By bringing together research and clinical practice, a new emerging model, “Brain Health Clinics”, are well-positioned to drive improvements. Rolling out this approach across the UK could allow patients to receive the most innovative treatments and diagnostic tools, whilst furthering research progress, wherever they live. These clinics are also ideally placed to find people at greater risk of developing dementia and offer them personalised support to improve their brain health.

**The solution**
The next government must promote emerging health service models that combine research and clinical expertise, and transform our approach to preventing, diagnosing and treating dementia by enabling the Brain Health Clinic model, working with health systems to adopt and promote the model nationally.

**Key facts and stats**
If a new treatment was approved tomorrow, only **2% of people** eligible would be able to receive it, and only one in three services would be able to deliver it within a year.

4. Enable NHS patients to be among the first in the world to benefit from cutting-edge dementia treatments.

For the first time ever, a new class of treatments for Alzheimer’s disease have shown promise in late-stage clinical trials – displaying modest results in slowing the progression of the disease and improving quality of life for people affected and their families. However, as with many new therapies, there are several challenges which need to be overcome before they can be made available on the NHS.

We need to identify the people who will benefit from these treatments while managing uncertainties around their long-term use. We also need to manage concerns about the impact on the NHS’s budget.

**The solution**
The next government must ensure there is a plan for the fast adoption of potential new dementia treatments to ensure that patients benefit equitably at the earliest opportunity. This needs to bring together key agencies across the UK to take a strategic approach.

The UK needs a dynamic approach to new medicines which reflects an evidence base that may change over time. The next government should ensure the NHS is prepared to provide access to treatments approved by the regulator as safe and effective, while gathering data on the outcomes of these new treatments in the real world.

**Key facts and stats**
Two new disease-modifying treatments for Alzheimer’s are now available to people in the US.

There are now **>160 trials** underway testing around 130 experimental treatments for Alzheimer’s across the globe, with over 40 in the later stage of development.
5. Drive earlier and accurate diagnosis through investment and piloting innovation in the NHS.

To treat people living with dementia, we must first be able to accurately diagnose them. Everyone has the right to know as early as possible if they are living with dementia and what is causing it. This knowledge enables them and their families to plan and make informed decisions about their future. With new treatments for early Alzheimer’s disease on the horizon, an early and accurate diagnosis is more urgent than ever, but current diagnostic capacity in the UK is severely limited after decades of underinvestment. In fact, currently one in three people with dementia will never receive a formal diagnosis at all.

The solution

The next government must ensure that there is a funding package in their first budget to support upscaling existing diagnostics, such as lumbar punctures, to ensure the current diagnostic pathway is fit for purpose.

The NHS must significantly increase capacity from 2,000 lumbar punctures a year to 20,000 a year by investing an initial £16m in infrastructure, equipment, and workforce training. This should be followed by committing to a sustained annual investment of £10m until new diagnostic tools are ready to replace lumbar punctures. The next government must also ensure the NHS proactively supports innovation and pilot programmes so that the health service adopts the latest diagnostic technologies, ensuring dementia diagnosis is fit for the future.

CONCLUSION

Currently, dementia is the only major condition which has no treatments available that can slow, stop, or reverse disease progression. The number of people living with dementia is predicted to increase, and dementia will soon be the costliest of all the major conditions in the UK. Given the scale of the challenge, dementia should be a top priority for all governments, who will need to deliver ambitious, long-term solutions to reduce the number of people affected by dementia in the future, while improving quality of life and outcomes for those already living with the condition.

The upcoming general election is a chance to ensure dementia receives the political focus it merits. By adopting the recommendations set out in this manifesto, the next government can turn the tide on dementia.

About Alzheimer’s Research UK

As the UK’s leading dementia research charity, we’re working to revolutionise the way we treat, diagnose and prevent dementia. We would welcome the opportunity to discuss any of these recommendations to help better tackle the biggest healthcare challenge of our time – dementia. If you have any questions, please feel contact publicaffairs@alzheimersresearchuk.org

For references please see our wider Tipping Point report