

House of Lords Debate on *Increasing the use of art or music-based interventions in people affected by dementia* – 23rd November 2021

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This briefing includes:

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2. Background on dementia and music and arts therapy
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1. Suggested Interventions

- *My Lords, music-based interventions such as Alzheimer's Society's Singing for the Brain groups, which bring people affected by dementia together to sing songs they know and love, have been proven to have multiple health and wellbeing benefits. These include improvements in mood, stimulation of memory, and the facilitation of acceptance of a dementia diagnosis. What support is the Government offering charities such as Alzheimer's Society to ensure they can keep delivering this kind of intervention, and will the Minister commit to attending a Singing for the Brain session in future?*
- *My Lords, this session has clearly emphasized the significant physical, mental, and psychological health benefits of art and music-based interventions for people with dementia. However, for some people these interventions work better when they can be delivered in person, particularly as some people with dementia will struggle to access services online. Can the Minister indicate when art and music therapy practitioners will be able to resume in-person delivery of sessions in care homes?*
- *My Lords, I know that charities such as Alzheimer's Society regularly hear from people with dementia who are diagnosed and then left without any support until they reach a point of crisis. What assessment has the Government made of the effectiveness of art and music-based interventions for those who are newly diagnosed with dementia, and what action is it taking to ensure support such as this is offered promptly after diagnosis?*

2. Background on dementia and music and arts therapy

There are an estimated 850,000 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

Music therapy has the power to improve the lives of some of the most vulnerable people in our communities. Research has shown that music therapy can significantly improve and support the mood, alertness, and engagement of people with dementia. As a result, music therapy sessions can often reduce the use of medication.

It can also help people who may find it difficult to communicate verbally, whether due to a physical or cognitive disability, emotional distress, or mental illness.

For many people living in care homes, since the beginning of the pandemic, arts and music therapies have either been moved to a virtual environment or stopped all together. We know that a lack of engagement can have a devastating impact on someone with dementia. Indeed, in an

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 Alzheimer's Society. Dementia UK: Update. 2014.

https://www.alzheimers.org.uk/sites/default/files/migrate/downloads/dementia_uk_update.pdf; <https://www.ukhca.co.uk/pdfs/UKHCADementiaStrategy201202final.pdf>.

Alzheimer's Society survey from June 2020, 79% of surveyed care home managers reported that lack of social contact was causing a deterioration in the health and wellbeing of their residents with dementia.

Alzheimer's Society would therefore like to know when art and music therapy practitioners will be able to resume in-person delivery of sessions in care homes?

3. Social prescribing within our health and social care system

People with dementia should be able to access social prescribing activities including music and arts therapy wherever they live in the UK. Often services like these for people with dementia are unavailable due to a lack of funding, or a lack of provision in their local area.

Alzheimer's Society believes that the upcoming social care reforms must recognise the important role of music- and arts-based therapy, particularly through social prescribing, can play in improving the health and welfare of people living with dementia.

Alzheimer's Society have recently published, *Stabilise, Energise, Realise*, a report that sets out a three-part programme of change that any Government long term social care plan should deliver. This includes the need to stabilise the system following the devastating impact of the coronavirus pandemic, energising the system through new levers and assets such as technology, housing, and personalisation, towards a final phase of full transformation by the end of the decade that will see a wide range of benefits realised.

The report recognises that social care should be about supporting people to live fulfilling lives. Social prescribing helps to improve people with dementia's health and by connecting them with community services which might be run by the council or a charity. Funding for these activities is crucial, as currently there is a postcode lottery for engaging activities for people living with dementia based on local commissioning. For people with dementia and their carers, such support can be vital.

A survey in 2018 by the Royal College of General Practitioners found that 59% of GPs believe social prescribing not only helped patients but also reduced their workload by an average of 28%, leading to a call for it to be used more widely.³

4. Alzheimer's Society's work in this area

Alzheimer's Society provides arts and music therapy to people affected by dementia and their loved ones across the UK. The Society also helped to found Music for Dementia, which produces resources for music therapy for people living with dementia.

One of the popular support groups supported by Alzheimer's Society is Singing for the Brain. Singing for the Brain brings people affected by dementia together to sing a variety of songs, in a fun and friendly environment. The activity encourages attendees to take part in vocal exercises that help improve brain activity and wellbeing. The Society reacted quickly to the pandemic, moving these sessions to be delivered virtually to provide stimulation and community, and even running 'Ring and Sing' over the phone for those without internet access. While face to face services are now resuming, virtual provision is continuing for those who find this easiest.

If you would like to find out more about Alzheimer's Society Singing for the Brain, please contact public.affairs@alzheimers.org.uk

³Royal College of GPs <https://www.rcgp.org.uk/about-us/news/2018/may/rcgp-calls-on-government-to-facilitate-social-prescribing-for-all-practices.aspx>