

Queen's Speech Debate – Making Britain the best place to grow up and grow old – 16/05/22

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1. Key Messages

- **This debate is taking place during Dementia Action Week (16-22 May).** This year's focus is dementia diagnosis.
- **It is vital that efforts to clear the Covid-19 backlog within the NHS address the stagnation of dementia diagnosis rates.** Alzheimer's Society estimates that just £70m in funding could address this issue: without it, **it could take 4 years to clear the current diagnosis backlog.**
- **The Government's new National Dementia Strategy has the potential to significantly improve care for people living with dementia,** making Britain the best place to grow old. However, **it must be adequately funded for its ambitions to be realised.**
- **The Government must also deliver on its manifesto commitment to a Dementia Moonshot** which would double dementia research funding over the next decade. This would level up dementia research and provide hope for the future.

2. Background

There are an estimated 900,000 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

The Queen's Speech mentions efforts to fund the NHS to clear the Covid-19 backlog; Alzheimer's Society calls on the Government to ensure that this includes efforts to address the stagnation in dementia diagnosis rates during the pandemic, which have now hit a five-year low.

In order to ensure that Britain is the best place to grow old, it's vital that the Government takes steps to enable everyone living with dementia to get a diagnosis and access the support that brings, and to draw on high-quality, personalised care that allows them to live the lives they want to live.

3. Dementia diagnosis rates

Getting a dementia diagnosis can be daunting. However, 91% of people affected by dementia agree that it's better to know: **a diagnosis allows people to unlock vital support, plan for the future, and participate in research.**

According to the most recently available figures, only 62.0% of people living with dementia aged 65 and over have a diagnosis.³ The national target is 66.7%. With diagnosis rates at a five-year low, **over 30,000 additional people are now living with undiagnosed dementia compared to pre-pandemic diagnosis rates.** This means they don't have access to the vital care and support a

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.

³ NHS Digital. Recorded Dementia Diagnoses, March 2022. <https://digital.nhs.uk/data-and-information/publications/statistical/recorded-dementia-diagnoses/march-2022>.

diagnosis can bring.

Memory Assessment Services remain vastly overstretched due to the pandemic. While people are still being referred into services, staff are unable to address referrals at the same rate. Due to delays in the system, people are approaching services with more advanced dementia than pre-pandemic.

A dementia diagnosis is not just beneficial for the individual. It could also reduce pressure on the NHS: up to 65% of emergency hospital admissions for people living with dementia could be avoided if they had the right support.

Alzheimer's Society is calling for just £70m in funding to address diagnosis rates. This is a crucial aspect of tackling the wider Covid-19 backlog within the NHS. This funding could be used to tackle the backlog in secondary care while making allowances for increased primary care costs. £17m was allocated to the issue in the last financial year, but this was insufficient to meet demand, and improved diagnosis rates by just 0.1%.

4. National Dementia Strategy

The Government is soon to release its new National Dementia Strategy, with a focus on how to improve care for people living with dementia. Alzheimer's Society welcomes the Government's efforts to involve stakeholders and people affected by dementia in the strategy's development and anticipates there will be much to celebrate in the strategy on offering people living with dementia choice and control over their care.

By helping to guarantee people living with dementia can access high-quality, personalised care, the new National Dementia Strategy also has the capacity to reduce pressure on the NHS and ensure that Britain is a great place to grow old. However, **it is vital that the Government publishes this strategy without delay, and with funding attached, to ensure that its ambitions can be fully realised.**

5. Dementia Moonshot

At the 2019 General Election, the Conservative Party made a commitment to bring forward a 'Dementia Moonshot' and "double dementia research funding over the next decade". This would increase funding for dementia research to £166m a year – meaning an extra £800m for dementia research over the next 10 years.⁴

Delivering the Dementia Moonshot would allow the UK to level up its already excellent reputation in the world of dementia research, offering us the scope to be world leaders in the field. This funding is instrumental for building back better: it would allow for the expansion of Alzheimer's Society's Centres for Excellence model; the development of novel methods for early diagnosis, such as blood and other biomarkers for different types of dementia; and the continued funding of the UK Dementia Research Institute, which brings together world-leading expertise in biomedical, care, and translational dementia research.

In ensuring that the UK is a world-leader in dementia research, we unlock the potential for Britain to be the best place to grow old: it offers hope of a cure, and of developments in treatment and care in the meantime.

⁴ Conservative Party Manifesto. 2019. <https://www.conservatives.com/our-plan>.