

# Written evidence submitted by Alzheimer's Society

## Digital Culture Social Media and Sport Select Committee: Sport and Concussion Inquiry

### 1 Introduction

- 1.1 Alzheimer's Society is the UK's leading support services and research charity for people with dementia and those who care for them. Working across England, Wales and Northern Ireland. Alzheimer's Society provides information and support to people with all forms of dementia and those who care for them through its publications, dementia helplines and local services. It runs quality care services, funds research, advises professionals and campaigns for improved health and social care and greater public awareness and understanding of dementia.
- 1.2 Alzheimer's Society is one of the biggest charitable funders of research into dementia in the UK. Today we are funding over £30m of research.
- 1.3 There are currently over 850,000 people in the UK with dementia and this is expected to grow to 1 million by 2025 and over 1.6 million by 2040.<sup>1</sup>
- 1.4 The total cost of dementia to the UK economy is £34.7 billion a year, and this will continue to rise to £94.1 billion by 2040. This includes costs to the NHS, paid social care and unpaid care.<sup>2</sup>
- 1.5 Dementia is the biggest killer in the UK<sup>3</sup>; while we are seeing increasing levels of correlation between dementia and contact sport, the causal link has not yet been clearly established. Increased research funding, as proposed in the Conservative Party 2019 manifesto<sup>4</sup>, would be welcome and inevitably increase understanding on this issue.
- 1.6 Traumatic Brain injury is just one factor that is believed to play a potential role in increasing risk of dementia. There are many other factors involved such as our age, genetics and other lifestyle factors which can be addressed such a smoking, high blood pressure, excessive alcohol consumption and obesity that may influence our risk of dementia as well.

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<sup>1</sup> [https://www.alzheimers.org.uk/sites/default/files/2019-11/cpec\\_report\\_november\\_2019.pdf](https://www.alzheimers.org.uk/sites/default/files/2019-11/cpec_report_november_2019.pdf)

<sup>2</sup> [https://www.alzheimers.org.uk/sites/default/files/2019-11/cpec\\_report\\_november\\_2019.pdf](https://www.alzheimers.org.uk/sites/default/files/2019-11/cpec_report_november_2019.pdf)

<sup>3</sup> <https://www.ons.gov.uk/peoplepopulationandcommunity/birthsdeathsandmarriages/deaths/datasets/monthlymortalityanalysisenglandandwales>

<sup>4</sup> Conservative Party, 2019. *Our Plan*. <https://www.conservatives.com/our-plan>

1.7 Given obesity and an unhealthy cardiovascular system are significant risk factors in someone developing dementia, Alzheimer's Society believes it's important we do not discourage people taking part in sport.

## **2 The need for more research funding**

2.1 There is urgent need to accurately gather data relating to traumatic brain injuries (from mild to severe) in sport over time. We need to see more research to understand any link between the number and type of injuries sustained during contact sport and developing dementia and what the underlying mechanism may be.

2.2 Dementia research receives around a sixth of the research funding allocated to cancer. For every £10 spent on burden of the disease, cancer research received £1.08 investment compared to just £0.08 for dementia research<sup>4</sup>.

2.3 Just 2% of total medical research charity spending in 2016/17 went towards dementia research.<sup>5</sup>

2.4 Alzheimer's Society believes we need to see more research to understand any link between the number and type of injuries sustained during contact sport and developing dementia and what the underlying mechanism may be. To ensure we can see this much needed research realised, the Government should implement their commitment from the 2019 general election, which promised to deliver a 'Dementia Moonshot'.<sup>6</sup>

2.5 The Dementia Moonshot would double government dementia research funding to £166m a year over the next 10 years, meaning over an extra £800m for vital research.

2.6 Alzheimer's Society welcomed this commitment but was disappointed to see it was not included in the Budget on 3 March 2021.

2.7 The funding brought forward by any Dementia Moonshot should be used to fund more public health and prevention research.

2.8 Alzheimer's Society believes that it is imperative that we continue to fund population level research, a field in which the UK has been a world leader.

## **3 Current Alzheimer's Society work in this area**

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<sup>5</sup> heimer's Research UK Annual Review, Alzheimer's Society Annual Review, Association of Medical Research Charities Research Expenditure June 2017

<sup>6</sup> [https://assets-global.website-files.com/5da42e2cae7ebd3f8bde353c/5dda924905da587992a064ba\\_Conservative%202019%20Manifesto.pdf](https://assets-global.website-files.com/5da42e2cae7ebd3f8bde353c/5dda924905da587992a064ba_Conservative%202019%20Manifesto.pdf)

### **3.1 Sport United Against Dementia**

3.1.1 Alzheimer's Society has been partnering with sports organisations as a part of our Sport United Against Dementia campaign, which ensures that sports clubs are inclusive for people with dementia, and everyone involved in sport can access Alzheimer's Society's expert dementia support.

3.1.2 Sport United Against Dementia is a pioneering partnership between Alzheimer's Society and many of the country's leading sports bodies. .

3.1.3 We are working closely with clubs, professional bodies, and sporting stars to:

- Ensure everyone involved in sport can access Alzheimer's Society's expert dementia support for years to come, including current and ex-players; managers and coaches; fans; and their families.
- Enable people affected by dementia to continue enjoying sport and supporting the clubs they love by making the UK sports industry truly dementia inclusive.
- Further scientific understanding of dementia, leading to better treatments and improved care, improving understanding of the links between sport and dementia - both as a potential cause and a preventative factor.

### **3.2 PREVENT**

3.2.1 Alzheimer's Society is a funder of the PREVENT dementia project, led by Professor Craig Ritchie at the University of Edinburgh.

3.2.2 PREVENT is a UK and Ireland wide study which charts the lives of a cohort of 700 participants aged 40 – 59. The aim of the study is to find ways of detecting dementia before symptoms even appear. This approach positions the project at the frontier of dementia research – defying what had previously been considered possible. We know from research that the brain changes seen in Alzheimer's disease are present decades before a person shows symptoms and is diagnosed. However, there is very little data around the effect these very early brain changes can have on a person's thinking skills and cognition.

3.2.3 The PREVENT project aims to:

- Predict who is at greatest risk of developing dementia so that we can deliver new treatments to slow or prevent the condition.
- Support the future development of biomarkers for early detection of disease.
- Track how the brain changes throughout middle age by using thinking and memory assessments, clinical examinations, MRI brain imaging and genetics.