

Major Conditions Strategy Submissions: dementia

June 2023

Question: In your opinion, which of these areas would you like to see prioritised for dementia?

- Getting more people diagnosed quicker
- Support after diagnosis
- Improving non-urgent and long-term treatment and care to support management of dementia

Question: How can we better support local areas to diagnose more people at an earlier stage? You might consider suggestions to increase capacity available for diagnostic testing or identify people who need a diagnosis sooner.

Life expectancy is increasing but people are living more years in poor health and with multiple health conditions (NIHR). With people living longer the number of dementia cases will continue to rise and reach more than one million by 2025.

Access to support post diagnosis is limited, people may wait years to receive a diagnosis and then wait significantly longer to receive community therapy to manage their speech, language and communication and cognitive symptoms.

Some dementias are rare or hard to diagnose. This requires the full multi-disciplinary team. Where language is a component of dementia, speech and language therapists need to be involved in accurately making the diagnosis (NICE, 2018).

However, access to speech and language is a post-code lottery. For increased diagnosis, there needs to be investment in community dementia teams. Every dementia team needs access to speech and language therapy to support diagnosis. Every person has a right to have access to vital and lifesaving speech and language therapy for their communication and swallowing needs, as well as having their physical needs met.

Question: How can we better support and provide treatment for people after a diagnosis?

All the conditions in the major conditions strategy share speech, language, communication and swallowing needs. Language, communication and memory is affected by all forms of dementia and tackling this must come front of any Major Conditions Strategy.

There is a lack of service to people with dementia. Provision differs from area to area, both in access, the professionals available and how much therapy you get. People often only see an allied health professional when they reach a crisis point. The benefit of employing speech and language therapists is frequently overlooked. Frequently, the wider workforce does not know what an allied health professional is or what they do.