
World Health Organization and Alzheimer's Disease International Say Dementia Must be a Global Health Priority



New Report Calls on Nations to Recognise Dementia as a Public Health Crisis

A report released today by the World Health Organization (WHO) and Alzheimer's Disease International (ADI) calls for governments and policymakers to make dementia a global public health priority. This new report provides an authoritative overview of the impact of dementia worldwide. In addition to valuable best practices and practical case studies from around the world, it contains a comprehensive collection of data, including hard-to-get statistics from low- and middle-income countries, thereby dramatically underscoring that this is truly a global problem.

To prepare the report, titled "Dementia: A Public Health Priority," WHO and ADI commissioned reports from four working groups of experts led by researchers from Institute of Psychiatry, King's College London and The Institute of Neurological Sciences, India.

"WHO recognises the size and complexity of the dementia challenge and urges countries to view dementia as a critical public health priority," said Dr. Shekhar Saxena, Director, Department of Mental Health and Substance Abuse, WHO. "Right now, only eight of 194 WHO member states have a national dementia plan in place, and a few more are in development. Our hope is that other countries will follow suit, using this report as a starting point for planning and implementation."

Marc Wortmann, Executive Director of ADI, said: "With its devastating impact on people with dementia, their families, their communities and national health systems, dementia represents not only a public health crisis but a social and fiscal nightmare as well. Around the world a new case of dementia arises every four seconds. Our current health systems simply cannot cope with the explosion of the dementia crisis as we all live longer. This report shows that there is a lot that can be done to improve the lives of people with dementia and their carers."

"There is an increasing body of evidence that the risk factors that can increase a person's chances of developing Alzheimer's disease are the same as those that cause many other non-communicable diseases (NCDs) such as cardiovascular disease, cancer, diabetes, and lung disease," says Ann Keeling, Chair of The NCD Alliance and Chief Executive of the International Diabetes Federation. "Last year's UN High-Level Meeting on NCDs in New York formally recognised that mental and neurological disorders, including Alzheimer's disease, contribute significantly to the NCD burden worldwide. By working together to address these common risk factors, the global health community can make great inroads into the burden of disease caused by Alzheimer's disease and these other NCDs, that together cause 3 in 5 of all deaths worldwide today."

Publication of the WHO/ADI report comes on the heels of an impassioned plea for action by global public health expert Dr. Peter Piot who, as former UNAIDS Executive Director, helped lead the world in turning HIV/AIDS from a certain death sentence into a manageable illness. In a recent speech, Dr. Piot described dementia - and Alzheimer's disease in particular - as a "ticking time bomb" given the rapid growth in ageing populations worldwide. According to ADI

research, now given even further legitimacy in the WHO's report, the number of people living with dementia worldwide, estimated at 35.6 million in 2010, is set to nearly double every 20 years, reaching 65.7 million in 2030 and 115.4 million in 2050. Drawing striking parallels between dementia today and HIV/AIDS in the 1980s, he argued that the world must tackle dementia with a similar level of urgency and concerted resources. "If the world needed a wake-up call, it is on this global crisis. I do not see any alternative than to treat Alzheimer's with at least the attention we gave HIV/AIDs," said Piot.

Obtain a copy of the report

Dementia: A Public Health Priority is available for download from 11 April at <http://www.alz.co.uk/WHO-dementia-report> [1]

About WHO and ADI

The World Health Organization is the directing and coordinating authority for health within the United Nations system. <http://www.who.int/about/en/> [2].

Alzheimer's Disease International (ADI) is the worldwide federation of Alzheimer associations that support people with dementia and their families in their respective countries. <http://www.alz.co.uk> [3].

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