

Press Release

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National dementia survey reveals Scots have positive attitudes and improved knowledge

A new Scottish Social Attitudes report, published today for World Alzheimer's Day, has revealed that attitudes in Scotland to people living with dementia are largely positive, with most people not seeing it as a stigmatising condition.

The survey, which was carried out by the Scottish Centre for Social Research (ScotCen), also showed that a large majority of people are very aware of dementia and the challenges it can bring for families. Nearly three quarters of people in Scotland – 74% - said that they know or had known someone with dementia, with almost 4 in 10 (37%) saying that a partner or a member of their family has or had dementia.

There was also a very high percentage of people who believed that dementia should be a priority for Government spending, particularly around care and support.

The survey was commissioned and funded by the Life Changes Trust, who previously commissioned a similar survey in 2014. Current figures show that, since 2014, there has been a significant increase in public awareness around risk factors associated with developing certain types of dementia, such as high blood pressure and smoking. However, almost a quarter of people still believed that there was nothing they could do to decrease their risk of getting certain types of dementia.

This survey highlighted the following:

Attitudes

- A substantial majority of people hold positive attitudes to people with dementia and do not see it as a stigmatising condition.
- 83% of people would want their friends and family to know if they were informed that they had the first signs of dementia.

- An overwhelming majority of people - 91% - think someone in the early stages of dementia can lead 'a fulfilling life'
- However, despite largely positive attitude to dementia, stigma still exists - around 13% of people said they would be 'ashamed' if their doctor told them they had the first signs of dementia and 37% would not want their employer to find out.
- Positive attitudes were most likely to be held by those who had cared for or known someone with dementia, younger people, women and those with higher educational qualifications, while stigmatising and negative attitudes were more likely to be found among men, older people and those who said they did not know much about dementia.

Health

- There was an overall increase in people's knowledge of symptoms and risk factors relating to dementia compared to 2014.
- The vast majority of people are aware of some well-established symptoms of dementia – for example 9 in 10 knew that 'difficulty in recognising people' is a symptom, and around 8 in 10 that 'losing track of time' or 'feeling lost in new places' are symptoms.
- However, there is substantially less knowledge about other symptoms such as specific sensory challenges - around 6 in 10 were aware that 'having hallucinations' could be a symptom and around 4 in 10 were aware of 'changes to taste or smell' and 'increased sensitivity to noise'.
- Almost 6 in 10 (57%) thought that there were things they could do to decrease their risk of getting dementia, compared with around one quarter (24%) who thought there was nothing they could do, with 19% saying they were not sure.
- Just 9% of people correctly recognised all five identified risk factors for dementia (they were high blood pressure, alcohol, smoking, diet and family history). However this was an improvement from 2014, when only 3% of people correctly identified all five.
- 35% identified either none (15%) or only one (20%) of the five risk factors correctly.
- While over 50% did *not* know or were not sure that smoking or bad diet were risk factors, this was an improvement from 2014, where over 60% were unaware or unsure that they were risks.

- Over 70% did not recognise, or were not sure, that high blood pressure was a risk factor (it is a risk particularly for vascular dementia which is the second most common form of dementia in Scotland.)

Carers

- Over half of people (56%) in Scotland have provided some form of care or support to someone with dementia.
- 21% of people had cared for someone with dementia on a regular basis, with a further 29% having some experience of caring for, visiting or helping someone with dementia.
- A very large majority of people (81%) said they 'agreed' or 'agreed strongly' with the statement that 'caring for someone with dementia is often very lonely', while 50% said that they thought that 'caring for someone with dementia was often very rewarding'.
- 76% strongly agreed/agreed that 'caring for someone with dementia often means your own health suffers'.

Government and public services

- Almost two-thirds of people (69%) chose dementia as the highest or second highest priority for more government spending on **care and support**. This was a higher figure than for any of the other conditions listed (including cancer, depression, stroke, heart disease, obesity).
- Almost half of people (43%) chose dementia as the highest or second highest priority for more government spending on **prevention** – second only to cancer.
- 8% of people thought that the Government provided 'a great deal' or 'quite a lot' of support to family members who care for a relative with dementia, with 54% saying 'not very much' or 'none at all'.
- 57% of people thought that the Government should fund care for those with mild dementia and 66% thought that Government should fund care for those with severe dementia, irrespective of how much money the person has.

Rights

- Public attitudes were very supportive of the rights of people with dementia being upheld, and their right to live a fulfilling life.

- The majority of people supported the idea that care homes make activities that have the potential to positively impact on quality of life available to residents with dementia.

The survey drew the following conclusions:

- There is still work to be done to improve knowledge of dementia and associated symptoms and risks. While there has been a significant improvement in public knowledge since 2014, there were still less than half of respondents who correctly identified high blood pressure, family history, smoking and diet as risk factors for certain types dementia.
- There is a very high level of public support for carers, with a strong feeling that the Government could do more to support those who care for people living with dementia.
- There is a very strong feeling among the public in Scotland that people living with dementia have a right to – and can - enjoy a fulfilling life.
- The high number of people who said they would not wish an employer to find out about a diagnosis of dementia suggests that there is more to be done to tackle stigma, particularly in the workplace.

Anna Buchanan, Director of the Life Changes Trust dementia programme said:

“There are definitely marked improvements in public knowledge about dementia in general, undoubtedly related to the increase in diagnosis rates, raising of public awareness and more news coverage over the last few years. It is also encouraging that Scots appear to have a generally positive attitude towards people living with dementia and their carers, and that they see care, support and prevention as priorities for Government spending. There is also a clear message that, as a nation, we believe that people with dementia have the right to lead a fulfilling life.

“Clearly, however, there are still gaps in knowledge around making connections between lifestyle and health when it comes to dementia and a still relatively low understanding that taking action now may prevent some types of dementia in the future. There are also still issues of stigma that need to be tackled, particularly in the work place. Scotland clearly wants to do its best by people with dementia, but we need to keep these issues on the public and political agenda in order to create the best lives we can for those affected by dementia.”

The survey was conducted by ScotCen Social Research.

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NOTES TO EDITORS:

Our work with people with dementia has shown that the phrase “Dementia sufferers”, or using the word suffering to describe dementia has a strongly negative view from people with the condition. We would request that you avoid using the phrase in headlines or in any article you publish to combat the negative way that people with dementia feel the condition is described.

The Life Changes Trust was established by the Big Lottery in April 2013 with a ten year endowment of £50 million to support transformational improvements in the quality of life, well-being, empowerment and inclusion of people affected by dementia and young people with experience of being in care.

The Scottish Social Attitudes survey (SSA) was established in 1999 by the Scottish Centre for Social Research (ScotCen), an independent research organisation based in Edinburgh and part of the National Centre for Social Research, the UK’s largest independent social research institute. The survey, which is conducted annually, provides robust data on changing social and political attitudes in Scotland with the aim of informing both public policy and academic study. In 2017, the Life Changes Trust funded 45 questions on attitudes to dementia which form the basis for this analysis.