

## **Media Release**

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### **National survey reveals Scots want to do their best by people affected by dementia**

A new Scottish Social Attitudes report released this week has revealed that attitudes in Scotland to people living with dementia are largely positive, with most people not seeing it as a stigmatised condition.

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

The majority of people in Scotland - around 76% - said that they know someone who has (or had) dementia, with almost 4 in 10 (38%) saying that a partner or a member of their family has (or has had) dementia. However, despite these numbers, there was a relatively low level of knowledge about risk factors that lead to some diseases that can cause dementia.

The survey was funded and developed by the Life Changes Trust and the Joseph Rowntree Foundation, to provide valuable information to inform funding and influencing activities in the years to come. It was conducted by ScotCen Social Research.

The survey highlighted the following:

#### **Attitudes:**

- The majority of people in Scotland - around 76% - said that they 'know someone' who has (or had) dementia.
- There was a great deal of willingness to help those with dementia, with around 9 in 10 (89%) saying they would be willing to help a neighbour with mild dementia while around 8 in 10 (80%) would be willing to help a neighbour with a more severe form of dementia. This is a strong indication that people would be prepared to play a part in making their community more dementia friendly.

- 83% of people would tell their friends and family if they were informed that they had the first signs of dementia.
- However, despite largely positive attitude to dementia, the survey revealed that 39% of people would not tell their employer about a diagnosis of dementia.

### Health:

- Despite the majority of people knowing someone with dementia, the survey revealed that many people were not aware that lifestyle and good health choices may prevent dementia caused by diseases other than Alzheimer's. (Approximately 40% of people with dementia in Scotland do *not* have Alzheimer's disease).
- Just 3% of people correctly recognised all five identified risk factors for dementia (they were high blood pressure, heavy drinking, smoking, diet and family history).
- 45% identified either none (21%) or only one (24%) of the five risk factors correctly.
- Over 60% did *not* know that smoking or bad diet were risk factors, and over 70% did not recognise that high blood pressure was a risk factor – particularly for vascular dementia which is the second most common form of dementia in Scotland.

### Carers:

- 20% of people had cared for someone with dementia on a regular basis, with 35% having some experience of caring for, visiting or helping someone with dementia
- A very large majority of people (83%) said they 'agreed' or 'agreed strongly' with the statement that 'caring for someone with dementia is often very lonely'.
- 76% strongly agreed/agreed that being a carer for someone with dementia often meant their own health suffered.

### Government and public services

- Two-thirds of people (66%) 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 (cancer, depression, stroke, heart disease, obesity).
- Dementia was chosen by the second highest proportion of people as the top priority for government spending – second only to cancer'

- 88% of people thought that the Scottish Government should require banks to have a legal duty to make sure people with dementia get help to manage their finances.
- 72% of people believed that the Scottish Government should make sure that shopkeepers have a legal duty to train their staff to help people with dementia.

### **The survey drew the following conclusions:**

- More needs to be done to inform and educate the public about how to minimise the risk of developing certain types of dementia or delay the onset of dementia.
- There is a particular need to focus on educating people about the importance of maintaining a healthy blood pressure.
- The widespread reluctance to tell an employer about a diagnosis of dementia suggests that there is more to be done to build confidence that employers would act fairly in this situation.
- Given that many people would talk to their friends and family in the first instance if they thought they were showing signs of dementia, it is vital to build greater understanding amongst the population at large of how to respond if someone close to them is looking for help.

**Anna Buchanan, Director for the Life Changes Trust dementia programme in Scotland, said:** "It is encouraging that Scottish people appear to have a generally positive attitude towards people living with dementia and their carers and want to help. We need to capitalise on that and ensure that we become increasingly dementia friendly as a nation. It is worrying, however, that general awareness about prevention is still relatively low and that people do not understand that taking action now may prevent some types of dementia in the future. This is an important public health message that we need to get across."

**Philly Hare, Joseph Rowntree Foundation, said:** "The results of this survey should be of broad interest to a wide range of people – policy makers, practitioners, influencers, employers and people affected by dementia themselves. The report raises questions about poor awareness of the risk factors for dementia and employment rights, among other important issues. We are delighted that we now have a baseline for public attitudes to dementia in Scotland, and similar questions will now be used in the British Social Attitudes Survey to compare how attitudes towards dementia vary UK-wide."

### **ENDS**

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## **Editorial notes:**

- The word dementia describes a set of symptoms that may include memory loss and difficulties with thinking, problem-solving or language. It is not just about memory loss. Dementia is caused when the brain is damaged by diseases, such as Alzheimer's disease or a series of strokes. The experience of living with dementia is affected not only by the symptoms but also by the cultural response of the society they are part of.
- The Life Changes Trust was established by the Big Lottery Fund in April 2013 with a ten year endowment of £50 million to drive 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. For more information, [www.lifechangestrust.org.uk](http://www.lifechangestrust.org.uk)
- The Life Changes Trust is committed to investing its funds across Scotland to support the prevention of dementia and the improved quality of life for people with dementia and their carers. The Trust has already issued £1.1 million to Age Scotland to raise awareness of dementia, including prevention and care, and has invested £3.4 million in 14 Dementia Friendly Communities. We plan to use the findings of this survey to support wider awareness and change.
- The Joseph Rowntree Foundation works for social change in the UK by researching the root causes of social problems and developing solutions. Together with the Joseph Rowntree Housing Trust, we use our evidence and practical experience of developing housing and care services to influence policy, practice and public debate. For more about our work, visit [www.jrf.org.uk](http://www.jrf.org.uk)
- The Scottish Social Attitudes (SSA) survey was launched by ScotCen Social Research in 1999 to provide robust data on changing public attitudes in Scotland. This report uses SSA data from 2014 to explore attitudes to dementia in Scotland and establishes a baseline from which change in future years can be assessed. The research was commissioned by Life Changes Trust and Joseph Rowntree Foundation.

## **In Scotland:**

- It is estimated that around 90,000 people have dementia; around 3,200 are aged under 65.
- The number of people with dementia in Scotland is increasing, primarily because the population is getting older. Based on current dementia prevalence rates, the number of people with dementia in Scotland is projected to double by 2038.
- Much of the financial cost falls on family carers and friends, who may also experience social isolation, exhaustion and health problems associated with the demands of caring.
- Dementia costs the country more than cancer, heart disease and stroke put together.