

G8 sets 2025 dementia breakthrough target (Update)

December 11 2013, by Robin Millard

Finding a cure or treatment for dementia by 2025 is within reach, British Prime Minister David Cameron said Wednesday at the first-ever G8 meeting on combating the disease.

Health ministers from the Group of Eight industrialised countries met in London to tackle what experts warn is a dementia time-bomb, with cases set to soar as the global population ages.

They agreed a funding surge for research in a bid to hit the 2025 target, amid warnings that the escalating problem could bankrupt healthcare budgets if a cure is not found.

The G8, chaired this year by Britain, hopes that by forming a common front, the summit will prove the turning point in tackling the disease.

"No one here is in any doubt about the scale of the dementia crisis," Cameron told the meeting.

"A new case every four seconds; a global cost of \$600 billion (440 billion euros) a year and that is nothing to say of the human cost.

"This disease steals lives, it wrecks families, it breaks hearts and that is why all of us here are so utterly determined to beat it."

The currently incurable condition afflicts some 44 million people worldwide—most of them elderly.

Sufferers of dementia, of which Alzheimer's disease is the most common form, often end up needing full-time care as it attacks their memory, reasoning and other brain functions.

Alzheimer's Disease International warned in a report last week that the number of sufferers is set to surge, trebling to 135 million by 2050, as life expectancy rises around the globe.

"In generations past, the world came together to take on the great killers. We stood against malaria, cancer, HIV and AIDS, and we should be just as resolute today," Cameron said.

"I want December 11, 2013 to go down as the day the global fight-back really started.

"The aim of trying to find a cure or disease-altering therapy by 2025, and big collective boost to research funding is within our grasp."

Coordinating dementia research

Spending on cancer studies currently dwarfs that on dementia.

The G8 nations—Britain, Canada, France, Germany, Italy, Japan, Russia and the United States—agreed to significant increases in funding for research and related infrastructure.

Britain is to double its funding to £122 million (\$200 million, 146 million euros) by 2022.

Meanwhile the European Union's health commissioner Tonio Borg announced a 1.2 billion euro (\$1.65 billion) budget for health research in 2014-2015, including dementia and neurodegenerative diseases.

The G8 agreed to coordinate rather than duplicate their research, sharing out the workload and filling in the gaps.

Joined by the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development and the World Health Organisation, the group agreed to hold forums throughout 2014 and meet again in the United States in February 2015 to review progress.

Scientists, pharmaceutical companies, university experts, charities, patient networks and representatives from major companies including BT, Intel, Nike and GE Healthcare were also involved in the London discussions.

Dementia causes mood changes and problems with reasoning and communication as well as memory loss.

Most types grow progressively worse and cannot be cured. Medication and therapy are used to alleviate the symptoms.

The conference also heard personal stories from sufferers and their relatives who look after them.

In a video shown to delegates, Hilary, who married her husband Peter five years ago and was diagnosed with Alzheimer's in 2012, said: "If I'd known I had this before we got married, I would never have married him.

"You realise what it's going to do to your partner... I just wouldn't want to put anybody through that."

The ministers also pledged to improve diagnosis rates and combat the taboo surrounding dementia.

"It is one of the last bastions of stigma and fear when it comes to illness," said British health minister Jeremy Hunt, who hosted the summit.

He said the 2025 target was ambitious as there was no "miracle" cure in sight, but "if we're not optimistic and don't put our necks out we won't ever have the chance of doing it".

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