

Governments Must Heed the Lessons of COVID-19 and the Disproportionate Impact for People with Dementia

Honourable chair and distinguished delegates,

Alzheimer's Disease International (ADI) is the global umbrella organisation, representing over 100 dementia associations/federations and in official relations with WHO. In light of the global COVID-19 pandemic, we express key concerns on behalf of the 52 million people living with dementia globally.

Age is the biggest risk factor for dementia, and globally the older population is being most seriously affected by COVID-19. We are also seriously concerned that progress towards the Global action plan on dementia will be negatively affected.

1. Initial data on COVID-19 mortality in people with dementia is sparse and needs addressing with urgency. Stark data is emerging in some countries, showing people with dementia account for a disproportionately high number of all COVID-19 related deaths.
2. In view of the widespread global shortages of medical resources, it is vital that healthcare professionals have clear, non-discriminatory guidelines to make difficult triage decision about access to treatment for people with dementia.
3. Families are faced with incredibly difficult decisions about whether or not to hospitalise a loved one, risking not acting in their best interest but often having to decide without medical training or knowledge.
4. People with dementia, especially in long term care facilities have been disproportionately impacted - and in some countries have been discharged from hospitals into care without COVID testing.
5. We implore all governments to support palliative and end of life care for all individuals, especially those living with dementia, who may be distressed and unable to express pain.
6. Distancing measures have resulted in increased isolation and disruption, which risks exacerbating cognitive decline and increasing post pandemic need for support, alongside mental health support.
7. People with dementia often have other NCDs, including mental health conditions. The prevalence and seriousness of these conditions is likely to increase as a result of COVID-19.
8. Diagnosis rates for dementia have decreased during the outbreak, with lack of access to diagnostic specialists and clinics. This will greatly impact on prognosis, with added complications of later stage diagnosis and disease progression
9. Disruption to research and clinical trials could be particularly devastating - given that there is currently no disease modifying treatment and disease progression will exclude participation.
10. Dementia is estimated to affect over 23 million people in the Asia Pacific (approximately 5 million in the South East Asian region) and this number's set to almost triple by 2050. Alzheimer's Disease International Asia Pacific Regional Office (ADI APRO) is keen to strengthen our collaboration involving all of our members, aligning with Member States in S. Korea, India, Indonesia, Myanmar, Nepal, Sri Lanka, Thailand, Timor-Leste, Bangladesh, Bhutan and Maldives. It is vital we collaborate more during this crisis period and beyond to combat the immediate impact on people with dementia and prepare better for the emerging dementia pandemic.