

STUDY ON THE ISSUE OF DEMENTIA IN OUR SOCIETY

Speaking Notes to the
Senate Standing Committee on Social
Affairs, Science and Technology

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May 11, 2016

Baycrest

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SPEAKING NOTES FOR
Dr. William E. Reichman
Senate Standing Committee on Social Affairs,
Science and Technology - Study on the issue of dementia in our society
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I want to thank the Standing Committee on Social Affairs, Science and Technology for the opportunity to speak today and for your leadership in studying the critical public health challenge of dementia. I am here on behalf of HealthcareCAN, the national voice of healthcare organizations and hospitals across Canada. We are committed to improving the health of Canadians through an evidence-based and innovative healthcare system. As an organization we continue to call for a Canadian Dementia Strategy and Action Plan.

My comments derive from my professional and personal experiences contending with dementia. I am a practicing physician with nearly 30 years of specialization in the care of patients afflicted with Alzheimer's disease and related causes of dementia. My prior research focused on Alzheimer's drug development and the effectiveness of dementia care approaches in institutionalized settings. I am presently a Professor of Psychiatry in the Faculty of Medicine at the University of Toronto. Since 2008, I have been President and CEO of Baycrest Health Sciences in Toronto, a global leader in seniors' residential living, healthcare, neuroscience research, and education. Nearly all of our clients are afflicted with multiple chronic physical disorders and brain diseases such as Alzheimer's and stroke. We are home to the Rotman Research Institute, recently ranked number one in the world in the impact of our science on today's understanding of human memory and aging.

Our organization also leads the Canadian Centre for Aging and Brain Health Innovation (CC-ABHI), a solution accelerator designed to improve healthcare outcomes and drive economic benefit by fostering collaborations between global

innovators and leading seniors' care organizations. This \$123.5 million, 5-year investment is generously supported by \$42 million in funding from the Public Health Agency of Canada.

This committee has heard from various pre-eminent organizations and individuals who have provided expert advice for helping you best understand the local, national and global challenges of dementia. You are no doubt familiar with the anticipated socio-economic costs associated with dementia. I join these organizations in calling for the Government of Canada to adopt a Canadian Dementia Strategy and Action Plan and will offer practical solutions resting upon **Five Pillars:**

Pillar 1. **Health Promotion:** Raising public awareness for maintaining brain health at each developmental stage throughout the lifespan.

Good perinatal care, enriched pre-school and early educational efforts enhance brain development in children and young adults. Encouraging physical fitness from early childhood through young adulthood also supports healthy brain maturation, and builds cognitive reserve. In mid-life, exercising regularly, controlling cardiovascular risk factors, limiting caloric intake, engaging in challenging occupational tasks, and managing stress all help maintain brain health. In later life, pursuing stimulating recreational activities, socialization, physical activity, and avoiding high saturated fat diets, all support healthy cognitive and emotional aging. Avoiding concussive head injuries is also critical in reducing the risk of late-life dementia.

Pillar 2. **Early Detection and Intervention:** Raising public awareness of the early signs and symptoms of dementia and setting public targets for early diagnosis.

Early identification and intervention with individuals experiencing cognitive decline is essential to prevent many avoidable consequences, including: poor compliance with medical recommendations; flawed financial decision making

increasing vulnerability and exploitation, and safety risks such as unsafe driving practices.

Pillar 3. Family Caregiver Support: Ensuring caregivers have timely access to information, effective care management and respite care services.

Practical information leads to better understanding for caregivers. As a result, they experience a greater sense of empowerment and confidence with lowered anxiety and depression. In many jurisdictions, adults with dementia and their families must navigate through numerous medical providers, social services agencies, legal services, financial services, transportation services, and home care services. It can all become overwhelming to coordinate. Having access to a single Dementia Care Manager or Coordinator helps families realize the most cost-effective use of support and medical services while minimizing the social and financial risks associated with dementia. Families must also have access to affordable, in-home personal care assistance for the individual with dementia. Many also substantially benefit from affordable access to respite care services during the day (e.g. dementia day care) as well as periodic, overnight residential care.

Pillar 4. Training: Equipping professional health care providers with the tools to accurately diagnose and care for those living with dementia.

There is a need to support enhanced training and use of tools for professionals involved in the care of individuals with dementia. Settings where this need is greatest include: primary care, long-term care and retirement homes, and community-based home health care. Some of the greatest challenges involve preventing and managing responsive behaviour associated with dementia, including: resistance to care, aggression, restlessness, sleep problems, and anxiety and depression.

Pillar 5. Research: Establishing dementia as a priority area for federal funding of research commensurate with efforts to eradicate cancer and heart disease.

Like other G8 nations, Canada's research funding agencies must remain committed to supporting all aspects of scholarship related to dementia from

discovery science to advanced, systems-level translational research. The future of preventative interventions and effective treatments for dementia is through partnerships between academia, government, philanthropy and industry.

We Can Seize the Opportunity

Canadians have demonstrated that when action is required, the nation can rise to the greatest of public health challenges. Remember, through decades-long coordinated efforts of government, academia, the life sciences and biomedical industries, we were informed about the importance of maintaining heart health; addressing risk factors (e.g., high blood pressure, obesity, and elevated cholesterol). We now appreciate the importance of staying physically active and not smoking. In sum, we helped Canadians become “Heart Smart.”

We did the same with cancer. A 2015 Canadian Cancer Society report notes that since 1988 “when the cancer mortality rate peaked in Canada, over 143,000 deaths have been avoided as a result of cancer prevention and control efforts.” The report also praises Canada as “one of the few nations in the world with a national population-based cancer registry that covers the entire population. The information gained.....is valuable for monitoring cancer patterns and serves as a source of data for health system planning and research.”

Our parents and grandparents feared heart disease and cancer – yet through focused public efforts and investments, we made great advances in prevention, diagnosis, and treatment of these threats to our wellbeing. For our generation and our children, we must now do the same for brain health and brain diseases like Alzheimer’s. Let us now work together to adopt and implement a Canadian Dementia Strategy and Action Plan.

Thank You.