

NATIONAL DEMENTIA STRATEGY: Update & Implications for Members



PURPOSE

On Monday, June 17th, Minister Petitpas Taylor released Canada's national dementia strategy, [A Dementia Strategy for Canada: Together We Aspire](#). HealthCareCAN has reviewed the report and developed a short analysis on the potential impact of – and opportunities for – our members.

BACKGROUND

The prevalence of dementia is growing in Canada. Presently, there are more than 419,000 individuals aged 65 and older who have been diagnosed with dementia. This number does not take into account those diagnosed with dementia who are under 65 or those who remain undiagnosed. In 2016, the Senate Committee on Social Affairs, Science and Technology undertook a comprehensive study of dementia. Following this Senate report, the *National Strategy for Alzheimer's Disease and Other Dementias Act* was passed, which required government to develop a national strategy on dementia, host a national conference and establish a Ministerial Advisory Board on Dementia.

In March of 2018, a number of stakeholder roundtables were held across the country. Four were organized by the Alzheimer Society of Canada, one was hosted by the Weston Brain Institute for researchers and one was hosted by the Centre for Aging + Brain Health Innovation at Baycrest for a group of stakeholders around innovation. In May, the federal government held a national conference on dementia, bringing together a diverse group of participants to identify and discuss challenges related to dementia, identify opportunities for collaboration and action, and share ideas for a national strategy. The culmination of these activities was the June 17 release of Canada's national dementia strategy.

Canada has invested nearly \$200 million on dementia-related research over the past five years through CIHR and its investigator-initiated and priority-driven research funding programs (Dementia Research Strategy, Canadian Consortium of Neurodegeneration in Aging, and the Canadian Frailty Network and AGE-WELL Networks of Excellence). Budget 2018 invested \$20 million over five years and \$4 million per year to create the Dementia Community Investment. Budget 2019 proposed investment of \$50 million over five years, starting in 2019–2020, to support the implementation of the national dementia strategy.

A DEMENTIA STRATEGY FOR CANADA: TOGETHER WE ASPIRE

The national strategy identifies three national objectives:

1. Prevent dementia;
2. Advance therapies and find a cure;
3. Improve the quality of life of people living with dementia and caregivers.

For each objective, a broad scope of activities has been proposed to guide work and evaluate progress in these areas. The strategy also identifies five pillars essential to implementing and achieving the national objectives:

- **Collaboration** – achieving progress will be a shared responsibility between governments, researchers, community organizations, those living with dementia and caregivers.
- **Research and innovation** – promoting research and innovation to fill the knowledge gaps, develop therapies and find cures.
- **Surveillance and data** – surveillance will assist in understanding the scope of dementia and focus efforts where most needed.
- **Information resources** – developing culturally appropriate and safe information resources on dementia to better educate Canadians on dementia.
- **Skilled workforce** – having sufficient skilled workforce to support dementia research and provide evidence-informed care.

Government has indicated that it will produce an annual report to measure the effectiveness of the strategy, which is flexible so that it can evolve and respond to new ideas and innovations, and changing needs over time.

Drawn directly from the strategy, below are the specific research and innovation activities that government will be undertaking as it works to achieve the aspired future state for each national objective:

PREVENTING DEMENTIA

- Promoting research that expands evidence related to a more accurate assessment of risk and protective factors already linked to dementia to move towards a more comprehensive understanding of dementia.
- Investing in research to study and test interventions that prevent dementia.
- Scaling-up and/or integrating promising interventions that enable and change behaviour focusing on modifiable risk and protective factors for dementia.
- Sharing Canadian research results on prevention-focused interventions.
- Including assessment of brain health and function in healthy living intervention research.

ADVANCING THERAPIES AND FINDING A CURE

To increase dementia research:

- Establishing and reviewing strategic dementia research priorities for Canada.
- Continuing to leverage existing federal investments and working with potential funding organizations to increase overall Canadian investment in dementia research.
- Pursuing international opportunities to expand investments including through new funding models.

To develop innovative and effective therapeutic approaches:

- Strategically focusing investments on developing innovative and effective therapeutic approaches.
- Enhancing Canadian efforts at the international level to promote innovation in dementia research.
- Ensuring that the federal regulatory framework for approval of new drugs is flexible and responds to the need for timely access to novel and innovative therapies.
- Fostering interdisciplinary approaches to innovation that bring together stakeholders and researchers to develop and identify effective and timely therapies.
- Encouraging opportunities for hospitals and associated academic institutions to adopt innovative approaches to therapies—many of these institutions are teaching hospitals where health professionals in training can test and apply new approaches.
- Exploring the feasibility of expanding the use of a tailored person-centred care model rather than a focus on the condition.

To increase adoption of research findings:

- Supporting projects that generate knowledge on how to effectively and quickly test research findings that can then be used in real-world settings.
- Encouraging research design that includes an approach to share research results and encourage their adoption.
- Developing mechanisms that support the sharing of best available research findings and potential innovations in ways that make them easier to adopt.

IMPROVING THE QUALITY OF LIFE OF PEOPLE LIVING WITH DEMENTIA AND CAREGIVERS

- Collecting data on diagnosis rates, including when the diagnosis is made.
- Building evidence on effective innovative and alternative care models that support quality of life.
- Identifying and adopting best practices, proven innovations and strategies that enhance integrated dementia care.
- Developing and sharing evidence-informed services, information and resources related to dementia care and advance care planning.
- Exploring and evaluating the use of affordable assistive technologies.
- Assessing the availability and effectiveness of dementia care guidelines and best practices, including for standards of care, evaluating new evidence and identifying gaps.
- Determining what additional tools, beyond guidelines and best practices, may be necessary for care providers to complete their work.

IMPLICATIONS

Research and innovation play a prominent role in the national dementia strategy – from identifying and assessing risk and protective factors, to developing effective therapeutic approaches, testing interventions, communicating research findings to scaling-up and integrating promising interventions. While the strategy does not make recommendations, it does establish a future state to aspire to.

Budget 2019’s investments of \$50 million over five years, starting in 2019–20 will be directed at supporting the implementation of the national dementia strategy and the research and innovation activities it outlines. Specifically, the development of treatment guidelines and best practices for early diagnosis, improving information on the rates of dementia in Canada, increasing awareness about actions that may prevent or delay dementia, and supporting and evaluating the impact of community-based projects.

The strategy also indicates that the aspired future state of research funding for dementia increase to more than 1% of dementia care costs. Despite the various funding announcements and allocations, the annual investment is currently less than 1% of dementia care costs.

The report also provides information on dementia-related initiatives in other government departments as well as provincially/territorially that may be of interest to members – see Appendices A (page 61) and B (page 67).

The federal government recognizes the need to invest in a skilled workforce. The national dementia strategy indicates that to achieve its national objectives Canada must have the right number of researchers studying dementia, exploring the development of therapies and working towards a cure. The strategy does not outline what activities or actions will be taken in this area.

FOR FURTHER INFORMATION

HealthCareCAN remains attentive to developments in the healthcare landscape as they relate to research and innovation and will keep members apprised of any developments along these lines. If your organization has any questions, concerns, or feedback in connection with these developments we encourage you to contact us so we can ensure your voice is heard.

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