



Department  
of Health

*From the Rt Hon Jeremy Hunt MP  
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Dear Colleague,

### **Prime Minister's Challenge on Dementia**

Dementia is one of the biggest challenges we are facing as our population ages. There are estimated to be 670,000 people in England with dementia and numbers are expected to double in the next thirty years. The Prime Minister's Challenge on Dementia was launched in 2012 to deliver sustained improvements in health and care, create dementia friendly communities and boost dementia research by 2015.

In February, following on from the international dementia summit we hosted in December, I announced a package of measures designed to improve the lives of people with dementia by ensuring better access to diagnosis and then access to the advice, information, care and support that they need.

Following the ambition set out as part of the Prime Minister's Challenge on Dementia, NHS England will invest £90 million with the aim of diagnosing two thirds of people with dementia by March 2015. As part of this, NHS England will work with local areas where we know that in some it takes up to 25 weeks to carry out diagnostic assessments whereas in others the wait is as little as six weeks on average.

As well as improving diagnosis, the recently negotiated GP contract means that from April, every person over 75 will have a named accountable GP and the most vulnerable two per cent in each practice will receive an enhanced service including same day telephone consultations and proactive case management. People diagnosed with dementia and their carers will also be able to sign up to a new service on the NHS Choices website to get essential help and advice in the early stages of their condition.

Whilst diagnosis of dementia is a matter for the NHS, I would encourage you to engage with local NHS colleagues to understand what support you can offer to increase awareness of dementia and improve diagnosis rates in your area. Local authorities also have a vital part to play in supporting people with dementia and their carers following diagnosis.

As you know, from April 2015, councils and the NHS will get £3.8 billion in the Better Care Fund to work with each other and the voluntary sector and it is expected that many local areas will use some of this to improve care for people with dementia, such as providing access to dementia advisors, reminiscence services and counselling. The best areas already do this and I am seeking the support of Health and Wellbeing Boards, and Local Authorities to make this a reality across the country. Already, in some areas we know that:

- Dementia advisors are available to support those with dementia and their families – someone who they and their family can get to know, who knows the local services and who is there for them every step of the way to give them expert information and advice and help them to manage their condition.
- ‘Reminiscence care’, such as memory boxes filled with personal items from someone’s past or time spent listening or dancing to music they remember to help keep their memories alive, is already playing a key part in excellent care.
- Counselling is offered, not just to someone diagnosed with dementia, but also to their family or carers, to help them adjust to this life-changing news and prepare for the challenges that will lie ahead.

You will be aware Public Health England and Alzheimer’s Society, supported by a coalition of corporate and public sector partners, launched the Dementia Friends Campaign on 7 May, a major social movement aimed at improving understanding and attitudes about dementia and towards people with the condition. One of the aims of the Dementia Friends Campaign is to improve skills so that more people know how to help those with dementia, by recruiting people into the Dementia Friends programme. I welcome your support in publicising this campaign, raising awareness and promoting the importance of completing the online training to become a Dementia Friend. More information about the campaign, including the online tool can be accessed via the Dementia Friends website: [www.dementiafriends.org.uk](http://www.dementiafriends.org.uk)

Whilst a diagnosis of dementia is very real for the person involved and their family, the importance of supporting carers cannot be overstated. The vision of the Carers Call to Action is that carers of people with dementia:

- receive recognition for their unique experience
- are recognised as essential partners in care - valuing their knowledge and the support they provide to enable the person with dementia to live well



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- have access to expertise in dementia care for personalised information, advice, support and co-ordination of care for the person with dementia
- have assessments and support to identify the on-going and changing needs to maintain their own health and well-being
- have confidence that they are able to access good quality care, support and respite services that are flexible, culturally appropriate, timely and provided by skilled staff for both the carer and the person for whom they care

I want to encourage you to sign up to the Call to Action. The Department of Health, Public Health England and NHS England have all signed up and together we can help improve the lives of over half a million carers of people with dementia. You can sign up to the call to action at their website  
<http://www.dementiaaction.org.uk/carers>

I look forward to hearing from you with your ideas on how health and wellbeing boards and local authorities can play a key role in driving this important agenda forward.

*Yours sincerely*

*Jeremy Hunt*

**JEREMY HUNT**