

## **People with dementia must be priority for COVID-19 vaccine access: Alzheimer's Disease International**

- *People with dementia must be included in the priority groups for new COVID-19 vaccines, both in care homes and at home, say Alzheimer's Disease International*
- *People with dementia are being disproportionately affected by COVID-19 and amongst most vulnerable in society*
- *Recent studies show COVID-19 deaths disproportionately affecting people with dementia; up to 26% of all UK COVID-19 deaths; 41% in Australia; over 20% in regions of Italy, and in Canada, 85% of all COVID-19 deaths are in long term care, where two-thirds of people have dementia*
- *The call comes as thousands of delegates from around the world gather virtually for ADI's 34<sup>th</sup> international conference*

**LONDON – 7<sup>th</sup> December 2020:** Alzheimer's Disease International (ADI), the global federation for dementia, calls for all people living with dementia to be prioritised as COVID-19 vaccines are released. ADI calls on global governments to follow the example of the UK in prioritising those living in long term care and those with underlying health conditions, including dementia.

The UK, the first country in the world to approve COVID-19 vaccines, has determined priority groups for access for the first available doses to be distributed this week, focussing on both residents of long-term care facilities, and caregivers and those with underlying medical conditions. ADI says that all people with dementia, who have been disproportionately impacted by COVID-19, must not slip through this COVID-19 vaccine distribution priority group net.

"We welcome the UK government's decision to protect the vulnerable, and often elderly, people who live in care facilities, from COVID-19, by providing front-of-queue vaccine access against the virus," ADI's Chief Executive Paola Barbarino explains. "But globally we must ensure vaccine access is extended specifically to people with dementia, those living in long term care and those living at home in their communities, who are among the most affected by the virus."

An international study<sup>1</sup> shows that deaths due to COVID-19 among people living with dementia as a proportion of the population are as high as 26 percent in the UK, 41 percent in Australia, and over 20 percent in regions of Italy. In Canada, 85 percent of all COVID-19 deaths are in long term care, where two-thirds of people have dementia.

Not all countries have released data on dementia-COVID-19 deaths, and ADI is encouraging governments to collect and publish these data as a matter of urgency.

ADI is also calling on governments to transparently measure the impact of COVID-19 on people with dementia. "The stark mortality data emerging must result in priority access to vaccines" continues Barbarino. "However, beyond the morbidity statistics, people living with dementia are the most likely to be confused by the constantly changing regulations and many have experienced a deterioration in condition, due to disrupted support services and routines, unable to access specialist care, day care and respite."

ADI says that the UK's approach of prioritising the health and wellbeing of long term care facilities residents, and caregivers, and those with underlying medical conditions, by providing front-of-queue vaccine access, should serve as a model to other countries across the globe, many of whom are gearing up to release COVID-19 vaccines.

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<sup>1</sup> Suárez-González A, Livingston G, Low LF, Cahill S, Hennelly N, Dawson WD, Weidner W, Bocchetta M, Ferri CP, Matias-Guiu JA, Alladi S, Musyimi CW, Comas-Herrera A. (2020) Impact and mortality of COVID-19 on people living with dementia: cross-country report. LTCCovid.org, International Long-Term Care Policy Network, CPECLSE, 19 August 2020.

“As the first nation to approve and distribute vaccines for the COVID-19 virus, the UK is setting an example for the rest of the globe to prioritise vulnerable people living in care facilities or with underlying medical conditions such as dementia,” says Barbarino. “We encourage governments across the globe to follow suit, and ensure that priority plans for vaccine distribution also include those with dementia, whether or not they are based in a care facility, given the disproportionate impact the virus has on those with the neurological disorder.”

The call comes as thousands of delegates from around the world gather virtually for ADI’s 34<sup>th</sup> international conference, the longest-running international conference on dementia. This year, President Halimah Yacob of Singapore, Her Majesties Queen Sofia of Spain and Queen Silvia of Sweden and Luis Guillermo Solís Rivera, Former President of Costa Rica are amongst the ambassadors for the conference.

ADI’s international conference centres around the poignant theme of *Hope in the Age of Dementia* and will be a timely meeting for the leading lights in dementia policy, research and care from around the world. The virtual conference is taking place from Thursday 10th to Saturday 12th December and will see 1,500 delegates from over 100 countries engaging in sessions around various topics relating to dementia.

“We’ve been waiting more than 20 years for any significant breakthrough in the treatment of dementia, and we are now facing a pandemic that is disproportionately deadly to the dementia community” continues Barbarino. “While the ongoing fight against dementia continues, one of the key talking points for this year’s conference will be the fast, fair and affordable distribution of potential vaccines to people most at risk.”

Developing drugs for both COVID-19 and dementia has highlighted the challenges of relying on purely medicalised responses to health crises. The conference will address other areas for hope such as risk reduction, psychosocial support and rehabilitation, among other things. Following the recent Lancet Commission<sup>2</sup> report expanding modifiable risk factors, there will rightly be a focus on the risk reduction activities people and governments can adopt.

“We know that things like smoking, excessive alcohol consumption and living a sedentary lifestyle, amongst others, can contribute to the development of dementia, much like we know that gathering in close contact, indoor environments can contribute to the spread of COVID-19,” says Barbarino. “While we wait for drug treatments for dementia and widespread equal access to vaccines for COVID-19, we must focus on the positive things we can do to limit the impact of both”.

“What we have also seen however, is a willingness for governments and people to galvanise and come together to innovate and find solutions to prevent the spread of COVID-19 and to find ways to deliver support – vaccines are upon us. We now need to see this same mobilisation for dementia, one of the century’s biggest health and social care crises,” continues Barbarino. “What we need to see next is action from governments across the globe to plan better for dementia and take similarly urgent steps to reduce the progression of the disorder in communities”.

**ENDS**

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<sup>2</sup> Livingston et al. A, et al. Dementia prevention, intervention, and care: 2020 report of the Lancet Commission: <https://www.alzint.org/u/risk-factors-infographic.pdf>

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### **About 34th International Conference of Alzheimer's Disease International**

Alzheimer's Disease International (ADI) is proud that its international conference is the longest running and one of the largest international conferences on dementia, attracting over 1,000 delegates from over 100 countries. Featuring a range of international keynote speakers and a high standard of scientific and non-scientific content, the conference programme enables participants to learn about the latest advances in the prevention, diagnosis, treatment, care and management of dementia.

The ADI 2020 conference, scheduled to take place in Singapore from 10-12 December, will now be hosted as a virtual event. We are disappointed to not be able to gather in person, but the safety of our delegates is at the top of our priorities and we are excited to be able to host an unforgettable virtual conference with a range of networking opportunities and a packed programme.

### **About Alzheimer's Disease International (ADI)**

ADI is the international federation of 102 Alzheimer associations and federations around the world, in official relations with the World Health Organization. ADI's vision is prevention, care and inclusion today, and cure tomorrow. ADI believes that the key to winning the fight against dementia lies in a unique combination of global solutions and local knowledge. ADI works locally, by empowering Alzheimer associations to promote and offer care and support for persons with dementia and their care partners, while working globally to focus attention on dementia and campaign for policy change. For more information, please visit [www.alz.co.uk](http://www.alz.co.uk)