



OpEd by Betsy Little CEO Alzheimer Society London and Middlesex

## **Dementia Needs a National Plan – We Can Do This Together**

By the end of 2031, 1.4 million Canadians will be living with some form of dementia, including Alzheimer's disease.

In London and Middlesex an estimated 7500 people (over the age of 65) have been diagnosed with dementia, a disease which causes problems with thinking and memory loss. It is also estimated that 25% *more* are currently undiagnosed due to stigma, fear and/or lack of awareness.

Age is a primary risk factor and we still don't know how to stop or cure this debilitating and ultimately, fatal disease.

The national statistic may seem way off in the future. But in reality, it's happening right here in our community. This makes dementia one of the biggest drains on our economy. In Canada, it's costing us \$33 billion per year in direct and indirect costs.

In 2011 alone, hours spent by family caregivers was the equivalent of \$11 billion in lost income – or nearly 230,000 jobs. It's not just economic costs associated with caregiving that are cause for alarm. Because dementia is a progressive disease, almost all caregivers must provide round-the-clock care, taking a serious toll on their physical and mental well-being.

The growing prevalence of dementia is troubling. But fortunately it's not 2031 yet. We can work together to reduce these soaring numbers and improve dementia care at the same time.

Team work is the idea behind our proposal for a Canadian Alzheimer's Disease and Dementia Partnership. This partnership would bring together policy-makers, researchers, health-care professionals, industry, and community leaders to work alongside citizens living with dementia to develop and implement a national dementia strategy.

Our families, neighbours and friends need and deserve support as they face this disease. In a recent online survey, 83 per cent of Canadians said they want a national dementia strategy.

This strategy would focus on three key things every Canadian affected by dementia expects: advance the progress of research, find ways of preventing and managing the disease and make sure those it affects live safely and with the best quality of life as possible in their homes and communities.



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A national dementia strategy is not only vital for Canada, it is key to the vitality of our community.

We're living longer and with fewer children to care for us as we age, investing in a national dementia strategy would help alleviate the growing challenges in the coming years but also make a big impact today.

Beating Alzheimer's disease involves each and every Canadian. The stakes are high. We can't let this disease bring down the prosperity of our community or country.

That's why this federal election, we're asking candidates to support a national dementia strategy and we need your help to make sure this happens.

Together, we can beat this disease. Take action by visiting [alzheimer.ca/election2015](http://alzheimer.ca/election2015)

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