

Against the backdrop of its ongoing work to create dementia-inclusive communities...

**Marking World Alzheimer Day tomorrow,
Dementia: Understand Together Campaign Survey Reveals
Public Perceptions of People with Dementia Changing for the Better**

- Half of us know a person with dementia
- Two-thirds would accept a person with dementia as a close friend
- 9 in 10 believe people with dementia have the right to be active citizens in their communities
- 8 in 10 believe there are things businesses can do to make their services accessible to people with dementia

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Ahead of World Alzheimer Day tomorrow (September 21 2021), a new survey by the *Dementia: Understand Together* campaign has found improving public perceptions and attitudes towards people with dementia since the last time similar questions were asked.

The nationally representative survey of over 1,200 people undertaken by Behaviour & Attitudes in July of this year found:

- **Welcoming society:** when asked about the attitudes of others, 67% of respondents believe most people would accept a person with dementia as a close friend and a similar number (68%) believe most would treat a person with dementia as they would anyone. Both of these results are up from 56% in 2016, showing a significant positive shift in public inclusivity and empathy towards people with dementia
- **Good company:** seven in ten (71%) people are happy to spend time with a person with dementia, up from 66% in 2018, and a similar number (72%) are happy to be in a social group in the company of a person with dementia, up from 68% in 2018. When asked if they wouldn't bother to visit a person with dementia because "they won't remember" three in four people (76%) rejected this, up from 73% in 2018
- **Active citizens:** in a new survey question asked in 2021, more than nine in ten who responded (92%) believe that people with dementia have the right to be active citizens in their communities

- **Businesses:** in another question not previously asked, more than eight in ten (81%) believe that there are things businesses and service providers can do to make their services accessible to people with dementia
- **Circle of friends:** demonstrating how dementia touches the lives of so many people, almost half of those surveyed (48%) said that they know (or have known) at least one person with dementia, up from 44% in 2018
- **Understanding:** a third of adults (33%) feel that they have a reasonable understanding of dementia while almost nine in ten adults (88%) know something about dementia – just 12% say they know nothing at all. These figures have remained consistent with those reported in the previous survey in 2018, notwithstanding the public discourse being understandably dominated by information on COVID-19 over the past 18 months
- **Early diagnosis:** more than nine in ten (91%) agreed that getting diagnosed at an early stage is good because it allows the person more of an opportunity to make decisions about their care – up from 78% in 2018
- **Seeking attention:** a further additional question for 2021 found that almost six in ten (58%) would react immediately if they felt they were becoming forgetful and were concerned that it might be a sign of early dementia. Three in ten (31%) would probably delay a couple of months and “keep checking myself”. One in ten (9%) say they would be anxious about such a diagnosis and would probably try and cover it up for a while.

The focus of the survey reflects an ongoing commitment by the *Dementia: Understand Together* campaign, which is led by the HSE in partnership with The Alzheimer Society of Ireland, Age Friendly Ireland, Age and Opportunity, and the Dementia Services Information and Development Centre, to help create communities that actively embrace and include those living with dementia and their families.

There are many forms of dementia – the four most common being Alzheimer’s disease, vascular dementia, mixed Alzheimer’s Disease and vascular dementia, and Lewy body disease – and approximately 64,000 people live with dementia in Ireland today. This number is expected to more than double to over 150,000 by 2045.

Not Surprising

Reflecting on some of the survey's outcomes, Dr Emer Begley, National Dementia Office, comments:

“It is perhaps not surprising that with almost half of the population knowing a person with dementia, more and more people are seeing the person and not the disease. The *Dementia: Understand Together* campaign works with partners and community champions in communities across the country, so that more of us have an awareness and understanding of dementia. Since we last posed similar questions to the general public, it is very positive to see that increasing numbers of people are more empathetic and understanding of people with dementia. This is very welcome news as negative public perceptions and stigma can isolate people with dementia and cause them to withdraw from social engagement and community life. More people are seeing the importance of social connections for people living with dementia, that this can enhance not just how they feel and their experience of life, but they understand that they too have something to gain from greater inclusion. What is also reassuring is that respondents want people with dementia to live their lives to the full and see that an inclusive community enables them to do that, from joining a local club to visiting a shop.”

For Prof. Suzanne Timmons, Consultant Geriatrician and Clinical Lead of the HSE's National Dementia Office, it is important that we convert our understanding of the importance of early diagnosis into seeking support:

“An interesting finding from the survey is that most of us agree that early diagnosis is good in principle but that, if push comes to shove, a significant number of us would delay seeking help. It is a very positive indicator that people understand that early diagnosis is a good thing, but equally it is important that people understand the benefits of seeking support in a timely way. It may not be dementia in the end, but the assessment may indicate certain risk factors for future dementia that could be tackled now. In the event that it is dementia, for many people, there are medications and cognitive therapies that aim to support the person to carry on their normal daily life despite the dementia. For everyone, getting a diagnosis enables us to make decisions about our future, and it means we can get the right information, advice and support at the right time. All of this gives us the best chance for having the best possible quality of life, regardless of the diagnosis.”

Community Supports

For more information on dementia, including details of local services and HSE Memory Technology Resource Rooms in each county, visit www.understandtogether.ie. Members of the public can also contact The Alzheimer Society of Ireland Helpline for support and details of their local Dementia Adviser on Freefone 1800 341 341 (Monday to Friday 10am to 5pm, Saturday 10am to 4pm).

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About the Behaviour & Attitudes Survey

This survey on understanding and attitudes to dementia was undertaken by Behaviour & Attitudes between the 1st and 13th of July, 2021. Interviewing was conducted on a personal basis using CAPI (computer assisted personal interviews) by trained members of the Behaviour & Attitudes field force, working under supervision. The sample consisted of 1,217 interviews which was quota-controlled by age, gender, region, area and social class, and is a representative sample of adults 16+ nationwide.

About the HSE's *Dementia: Understand Together* campaign

The *Dementia: Understand Together* campaign is a public support, awareness and information campaign that aims to inspire people from all sections of society to stand together with the 500,000 Irish people whose families have been affected by dementia. Led by the HSE in partnership with The Alzheimer Society of Ireland and Age Friendly Ireland, it is one of six key priorities of the Irish National Dementia Strategy. *Dementia: Understand Together* is now supported by over 40 partner organisations across Ireland, including in the retail, transport, banking, health, voluntary and community sectors. These organisations, together with almost 400 community champions from all over Ireland, are leading the way in creating communities that actively embrace and include those living with dementia and their families.