



Carers: Irreversible deterioration in dementia patients

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Those caring for people with dementia have warned of a deterioration in the condition of their loved ones — and said the additional strain of the pandemic had also harmed their own mental health.

Research being launched today by the Alzheimer Society of Ireland (ASI) found that some carers reported “irreversible deterioration” in the condition of their loved one over the past year, while they themselves were often left at breaking point.

The findings are based on phone and online surveys with 17 people living with dementia and 240 family carers.

According to the report:

- 81% of respondents were concerned about decline in the person with dementia;
- 54% of family carers reported a decline in their mental health, and a 40% decline in their physical health;
- 54% of family carers were worried about how they will continue to cope, with 44% feeling less able to cope;
- 28% of family carers reported considering a move to long-term care for the person with dementia, with 65% saying that this has become a consideration sooner due to the pandemic.

There are 64,000 people with dementia in Ireland and the number of people with the condition is set to more than double in the next 25 years to more than 150,000 by 2045.

ASI chief executive Pat McLoughlin said: “Other relationships and responsibilities [such as children or work] have also paid a price.

“The fact that there was no prioritisation of family carers in the vaccine rollout has left these people feeling

abandoned. There were even cases of suicide risk reported among family carers.”

The ASI wants the urgent and safe re-opening of day-care centres and social clubs, amid an increase last year in the number of carers needing practical support.

One full-time carer, Wicklow-based Aisling Harmon, said: “My Mum has advanced Parkinson’s disease and dementia. Her needs could not be put on hold, but our daycare and community services were cut off overnight.

“There was no emergency or contingency plan to fall back on. The world went online, but homecare couldn’t.

“Vaccines get rolled out, but carers were at the back of the queue.

“Everyone is focused on getting back to normal. My new norm is more of the same, only with less supports than before.”

The ASI said the necessary capital and revenue resources should be provided now for daycare reopening arising from public health guidelines, as well as better assistance for family carers through support groups and therapeutic services including counselling.

It also wants continued funding of ASI’s Day Care at Home service in order for additional support to be provided, the urgent provision of additional dementia-appropriate homecare hours, and the piloting of a statutory homecare scheme.

■ Alzheimer Society of Ireland national helpline: 1800 341 341; alzheimer.ie



Pat McLoughlin, chief executive of Alzheimer Society of Ireland.