



EMBARGOED UNTIL THURSDAY 28th May 2020

MEDIA RELEASE

Jersey Alzheimer's Association calls for action to support people living with dementia through the COVID crisis.

Jersey Alzheimer's Association (JAA) is pleased to enjoy a very positive and supportive relationship working closely with the Government of Jersey and the Health & Social Care department in particular. JAA therefore very much regrets and is disappointed to have to vocalise its frustration and criticism at this very difficult time.

JAA feels that the Government of Jersey has worked extremely hard and should be applauded for its efforts to focus and mobilise key services at a difficult and unclear time. Sadly however, the Government has also chosen to ignore advice, comment and requests from JAA and from within its own departments and has in our opinion risked overlooking the care and support of older people and those with cognitive difficulties or dementia living in the community.

It was already well known that people living with dementia and older people living with other health conditions were amongst those facing the more severe effects of coronavirus. However, last week, the Office of National Statistics in the UK released new data that has shown that dementia is the most common pre-existing condition found among deaths involving COVID-19. In England and Wales a quarter of those who have died with coronavirus had dementia. JAA has submitted a Freedom of Information request to the Government for comparative local data but there is nothing to suggest that the risks in Jersey are significantly different.

As early as the 18th March JAA forwarded information to Health & Social Care asking for a different style of communication to be considered alongside others. Communication that recognised that not everyone has access to or used the web or social media and that many people still rely on the local paper or printed information and the local radio. JAA also asked that information was communicated in a simple and clear way using examples and scenarios that would assist understanding. Sadly, despite this being raised at all levels and JAA offering to assist in the production this has never been forthcoming.

Indeed one of the first public press conferences given by the Chief Minister and the Health Minister included a detailed explanation of the Ethical Care protocol regarding how doctors would make difficult decisions if they had to chose who should receive life saving treatment if resources were stretched. JAA was pleased that this protocol closely followed guidance issued by Alzheimer Europe but were saddened in the way the message was delivered and the alarm caused amongst the elderly and JAA's clients as no prior notification had

been given to JAA allowing us to prepare and support those who may be anxious and upset.

The Government has focused community information around the 'Connect Me' webpage and leaflets which despite initial assurances to the contrary still contain no mention at all of support services for people with dementia, for older people generally or for carers. Not everyone sees themselves as needing help, not everyone sees themselves as having an 'emotional or mental health' problem as it is classified via Connect Me. Once again JAA has been tireless in asking that our services are highlighted and our organisation and contact details are included in Connect Me and other leaflets and wording softened to appeal more widely. To date a conscious decision has been made not to adapt this information and JAA has had to invest significant amounts in placing adverts to try and ensure that the community is aware of our continued support.

As the COVID crisis continues, JAA is hearing more and more stories from families and care home staff that social or physical distancing is causing people to lose recognition of loved ones, or to deteriorate more rapidly. Regular social contact with loved ones not only helps people living with dementia to feel secure, but also helps them to maintain basic cognition and communication skills.

If a lack of contact is having serious health implications for people living with dementia, we need the Government to take measures that keep them safe and well.

Jersey relies on the expertise of the amazing staff from the Memory Assessment Clinic at Overdale. JAA was informed on 25th March, with no prior warning, that the clinic had closed and the staff redeployed. We understand the need to consider all options at this unprecedented time however no skeleton staff team was left to support people with dementia, those waiting for results of tests or carers in crisis. JAA became the main signpost for all dementia support and only because of the good will and absolute commitment of key Health & Social Care practitioners to go the extra mile have clients had anywhere close to the support needed.

JAA is pleased that the Health & Social Care department is considering how it can reintroduce support services via the Memory Clinic asap. However, given the clear evidence that people living with dementia are amongst those most negatively impacted there is an absolute and urgent need for a plan from the Government that supports this most vulnerable group through this crisis and not just rely on charities to do it for them.

Note:

Jersey Alzheimer's Association (JAA) exists to make Jersey a more dementia friendly island where everyone with dementia is accepted and their needs understood and promoted. Jersey has over 1600 people living with dementia. Whilst dementia does not discriminate in terms of age the majority of people with some form of dementia are aged 65 years and above.

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For further information please contact:

Sean Pontin, Chief Executive, Jersey Alzheimer's Association

E-mail: sean@jerseyalzheimers.com Phone: 07829772200