

Q & A with Dr. Sivananthan:



A LENS OF HOPE



Dr. Saskia Sivananthan is the Chief Research and Knowledge Translation Officer at the Alzheimer Society of Canada. Previously, she served as a senior strategy and policy advisor consulting for the World Health Organization (WHO) on its global dementia strategy. She also co-drafted the WHO's Global Action Plan on the Public Health Response to Dementia, which was unanimously adopted at the 170th World Health Assembly by all 194 member-states.

How did you become interested in dementia research?

The brain has always fascinated me, especially in the way research helps us understand this complex and mysterious organ.

When I was a graduate student, however, I lived in an apartment building for seniors and saw first-hand the struggles they faced taking care of themselves and finding their way through the health care system, especially for those living with dementia or a cognitive impairment.

That's when I wanted to make a difference and began working in health services and policy research. My work focused on improving accessibility to health care for older people and those with dementia, and ensuring that support and services meet their needs.

You will be in Winnipeg for the Spotlight on Dementia Research forum taking place on September 24. Why is this an important forum for the public to attend?

Forums like these give us a lens of hope that the science of dementia is advancing. They also provide new information on reducing the risk of dementia or how to better manage the disease, whether you're living with it or are a caregiver.

Recent research on diagnostic testing shows promise. Can you comment on this research and the potential impact on people with dementia and their families?

There is still no single test for dementia, and diagnosis is a complex and lengthy process. Improving diagnosis, as well as identifying those at risk, is an important field of research we support through the Alzheimer Society Research Program.

We've funded several researchers who are pursuing an eye exam to detect Alzheimer's disease. The retina is an extension of and shares many similarities with the brain. Deterioration

of the retina may mirror the changes occurring in the brain's blood vessels, which will increase our understanding of the disease process.

Other researchers are closing in on a blood test for dementia. While more study is required, this kind of test could be available in the very near future.

Can you comment on the new national dementia strategy as it relates to research?

The Alzheimer Society welcomes the national dementia strategy and we are grateful for the federal government's ongoing commitment to address the growing challenges of dementia. The strategy calls for advancing therapies to improve quality of life for people with dementia and help find a cure through novel and innovative research. But to do this, we need a fully funded and implemented strategy. That's why Alzheimer Societies across the country will continue to champion for its full implementation, especially with the upcoming federal election.

Public Forum with Dr. Sivananthan SPOTLIGHT ON DEMENTIA RESEARCH

**Tuesday, September 24, 7 to 8:30 pm
Samuel N. Cohen Auditorium
St. Boniface Hospital Research
351 Tache Ave., Winnipeg**

Find out what's happening now in dementia research and how it will impact the future.

DEMENTIA RESEARCH CHAIR SPONSOR:

