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Subject: Neurological conditions must be a research priority

10th March 2025

Dear Secretary of State,

On behalf of the Neurological Alliances of Scotland, England, Wales and Northern Ireland we are writing to urge the UK Government to prioritise investment into neurological conditions research.

At least one in six people in the UK have at least one neurological condition¹. There are over 600 known neurological conditions - any condition that affects the brain, spinal cord or nervous system. They can affect anyone, at any age and at any time. It is likely that you or a loved one will be impacted by a neurological condition in your lifetime.

Burden of disease and future impact

A study published by *The Lancet* has evidenced neurological diseases to be the leading cause of overall disease burden in the world, exceeding all other diseases such as cancer². With an ageing population in the UK, the prevalence of certain neurological conditions, such as dementias, is increasing. For example, Public Health Scotland estimate the annual disease burden to increase by 21% over the next 20 years in Scotland, with neurological diseases, cardiovascular diseases

¹ The Neurological Alliance 'Neuro Numbers' <https://www.neural.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/2021/04/neuro-numbers-2019-1.pdf> published July 2019.

² Steinmetz et al. 'Global, regional, and national burden of disorders affecting the nervous system, 1990–2021: a systematic analysis for the Global Burden of Disease Study 2021', *Lancet Neurology*, Vol 23, Published Online March 14, 2024, p. 334.

and cancers accounting for 68% of the total forecasted increase³. Emerging conditions such as Long COVID add to this projected disease burden, as research shows neurological symptoms to be common in Long COVID cases⁴.

As evidenced in our submission to the Government's 2025 Spending Review, this burden of disease has a significant impact on the UK economy, with an *Economist Impact* report citing neurological conditions cost the UK more than 4.3% of its GDP in 2019, or at least £96bn⁵.

Funding disparity

Despite their prevalence, cost and expected rise, funding for research investigating neurological conditions remains disproportionately low, constituting only 8.9% of the UK's health research expenditure in 2022⁶. Researchers working in the field of neurological conditions face the prospect of losing their jobs due to increasingly insecure funding, and clinical trials are severely limited in their number. Moreover, short funding cycles make it challenging to deliver impactful research, particularly when research requires in vivo studies to be completed in these timeframes.

While we recognise the work undertaken in neurodegenerative areas including the dementias, there is a pressing need for research and support into a wider breadth of neurological conditions such as congenital, neonatal, neurovascular and fluctuating conditions as well as neurological conditions caused by infection⁷.

In recognition of these vastly under researched areas, the Institute for Public Policy Research Commission on Health and Prosperity published a report in 2024 recommending that the UK increases public expenditure on health investment by £5 billion by the end of the next Parliament, identifying 'under researched' areas such as 'cardiovascular disease, Alzheimer's/dementia, neurological conditions and mental health' as requiring further investment⁸.

³ Public Health Scotland. 'Forecasting the future burden of disease: Incorporating the impact of demographic transition over the next 20 years', Scottish Burden of Disease. 2022.

⁴ Greenhalgh, Trisha et al. 'Long COVID: a clinical update', *The Lancet*, Volume 404, Issue 10453, 2024, p.710

⁵ Niraula, Ashish. 'The value of action: mitigating the impact of neurological disorders in the United Kingdom Findings report' *The Economist Impact*, 2024, p.4.

⁶ UK Clinical Research Collaboration. "UK Health Research Analysis 2022". This report was in early access from December 2023, and formally published on 1st of February 2024, p. 33

⁷ Steinmetz et al p.344

⁸ Thomas, O'Halloran et al. 'Our greatest asset: The final report of the IPPR Commission on Health and Prosperity', *Institute Public Policy Research Commission on Health and Prosperity*, published September 2024, p.79.

With £20.4 billion committed to research and development in the UK Autumn Budget, £2 billion of which is allocated to the National Institute for Health and Care Research (NIHR) to support life sciences innovation and accelerate the delivery of the health and growth missions, we are calling on the Department of Health and Social Care and the Department of Science, Innovation and Technology to ensure neurological conditions are a research priority.

Leveraging partnerships and innovation

Over 30% of public investment into inflammatory, immune and neurological research in the UK in 2022 was provided by charities⁹. Initiatives like the Octopus MS Clinical Trials Platform, DecodeME and MND-SMART illustrate impactful third sector collaboration on neurological research. By fostering partnerships with pharmaceutical companies, academic institutions, and the third sector, the Government can maximise the impact of public investments, accelerating the development of treatments, disease management options, and identifying areas of early intervention and prevention to help mitigate the burden of disease. However, private-sector contributions to neurological research remain limited compared to other fields. Addressing this disparity requires proactive government leadership to incentivise and direct investment toward neurology.

Following our submission to the 2025 Spending Review, we urge the UK Government to:

1. Invest in neurological condition research in line with the proposal from the Institute for Public Policy Research's Commission on Health and Prosperity (2024)
2. Prioritise neurological conditions as a key research area and provide stability and long term certainty for neurological research through 10 year budgets (as identified in the Autumn budget)

Failing to adequately fund neurological condition research disregards the needs of millions living with these conditions across the UK. As the UK seeks to position itself as a global leader in science and innovation, prioritising neurological research is a strategic opportunity.

We stand ready to collaborate with the government to advance these goals. Together, we can ensure that the UK leads the way in addressing the challenges posed by neurological conditions and improving the lives of those affected.

We would welcome the opportunity to discuss this further and provide any additional information to support these recommendations.

⁹ The Association of Medical Research Charities, '2024: Our Sector's Footprints', Published June 2024. Accessible: <https://www.amrc.org.uk/our-sectors-footprint-in-2023>



Thank you,

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Co-signatories:







