

## **WDC Dementia Risk Reduction Statement**

With no cure for dementia currently in sight, the World Dementia Council (WDC) considers dementia risk reduction to be a critical element of the global dementia agenda. It offers the only potential means of reducing the number of people getting dementia or slowing the progression and impact of the disease while the world awaits the crucial breakthrough therapy. The Council has therefore made risk reduction one of our five priority areas of work.

Following a review of the evidence on dementia risk reduction carried out by WDC member Harry Johns, Council members concluded that the evidence strongly suggests cognitive decline at the population level can potentially be affected by behaviour changes acting on cardiovascular risk factors. Harry Johns' review found that:

*“Regular physical activity and management of cardiovascular risk factors (e.g. diabetes, obesity, smoking, and hypertension) are associated with a reduced risk of cognitive decline and may reduce the risk of dementia. Further, a healthy diet and lifelong learning/cognitive training may also reduce the risk of cognitive decline.”*

A consensus already exists in some parts of the world that the evidence linking modifiable risk factors to dementia is sufficient to justify considered action and further research on dementia risk reduction, with the aim of delaying onset and reducing prevalence.

While the evidence base is building, more work needs to be done to better understand the particular relationships between individual risk factors and dementia risk, and to evaluate the effectiveness of interventions addressing modifiable risk factors in reducing the risk, progression and severity of dementia.

### **The WDC makes the following call to governments around the world:**

“In addition to trying to find a cure or disease-modifying therapy and continuing to improve diagnosis, care and quality of life for those living with dementia, a risk reduction (or risk management) approach must also be an important area of focus as we tackle the huge challenge posed by this life-shattering disease.

By helping people to make healthy lifestyle choices and address risk factors we may be able to reduce the rate at which people are getting dementia and slow cognitive decline, while also helping prevent many other non-communicable diseases too, based on a ‘what’s good for the heart is good for the brain’ mantra.

We encourage you all to take action on dementia risk reduction, by:

- (i) embedding dementia risk reduction/management in to your public health policies and campaigns and your non-communicable disease strategies and action plans, as some countries are already doing; and/or
- (ii) investing in further research in this area, including running population-level intervention studies, to urgently build the evidence base on dementia risk reduction.”