

# Dementia accounts for one in eight deaths

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**Statisticians say that a better understanding of dementia and improved diagnosis of the disease means that it is more likely to be recorded on death certificates** JOE GIDDENS/PA

Experts described dementia as the biggest health crisis of our time yesterday as official figures showed that it caused one in eight deaths in England and Wales last year.

The percentage of deaths by dementia and Alzheimer's rose to 12.8 per cent and was the leading cause of death for the [fourth consecutive year](#).

For women the rate was significantly higher, with dementia causing 16.7 per cent of deaths and 23.6 per cent for those aged 80 and above.

The Office for National Statistics (ONS) said that better understanding and diagnosis made dementia more likely than other conditions to be recorded on death certificates. [Alzheimer's disease](#) is its most common form.

The statisticians added that the disease was becoming more common as people lived longer and treatment for other illnesses improved.

Dame Barbara Windsor, the *EastEnders* actress who had dementia diagnosed in 2014, called for Boris Johnson to honour his pledge to fix the social care system.

She and her husband Scott Mitchell wrote an open letter with the Alzheimer's Society backing its call for a £2.4 billion fund to support people with dementia. They have also been appointed ambassadors for the charity.

Dame Barbara, 82, said: "We're lucky to have amazing support but my heart goes out to the many, many people who are really struggling to get the care they so desperately need. Please join us. Let's do everything we can to sort this out."

Sally Copley, director of policy at the Alzheimer's Society, said: "We need to take action now to tackle the biggest health crisis of our time. One person develops dementia in the UK every three minutes and there are still far too many facing a future alone, without adequate support."

The ONS figures showed that among men [heart disease](#) was the most frequently recorded cause of death, at 13.2 per cent of cases. However, drug overdoses were the biggest killer of men aged 35 to 49, overtaking suicide.

For women aged between 50 and 64 the most common cause of death was breast cancer, replacing lung cancer and reflecting the long-term decline of smoking.

Last year 541,589 deaths were recorded in England and Wales, the highest number since 1999. Statisticians said that this reflected a rise in the population.

Death rates fell for men, with 1,120.9 deaths per 100,000 men — 0.3 per cent lower than in 2017 — but increased slightly among women, with 838 deaths per 100,000. Death rates had been falling for a long time until 2014. They dipped again in 2015 but have been broadly stable since then.

There was wide regional variation: London had 1,003 deaths per 100,000 people, compared with 1,262 in the northeast of England.

The rate of stillbirths in England fell to the lowest on record at four per 1,000 births, down from 4.1 in 2017 and 5.1 in 2010, while the neonatal mortality rate last year was 2.8 deaths per 1,000 live births. The stillbirth rate in Wales was 4.4 per 1,000 births and the neonatal mortality rate was 2.5 per 1,000 births. Improvement in England will have to accelerate rapidly for the government to meet its target of halving stillbirths and neonatal deaths by 2025.