

## Meeting of the European Working Group for People with Dementia, Brussels, Belgium 10 – 11 December 2024

SDWG member, Margaret McCallion, travelled to Brussels for an in-person meeting of the European Working Group for People with Dementia. A busy schedule of meetings and engagement across two days presented the opportunity to work alongside people with dementia from across Europe, and to support research that is currently taking place.



Margaret

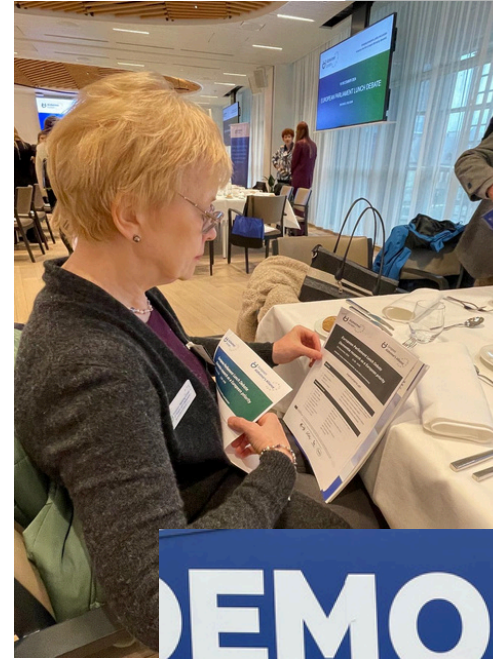
Members of the European Working Group were invited to attend a lunch debate at the European Parliament focusing on ‘Dementia research as a European priority’. Hosted by Tilly Metz, the co-chair of the European Alzheimer’s Alliance and member of the European Parliament, the debate provided an opportunity to celebrate advances in dementia research and to look to the future. People with lived experience were joined by representatives of national Alzheimer associations to hear an update on progress in the prevention, diagnosis and treatment of dementia and an overview of key research initiatives looking to make continued improvements to the experiences of people living with dementia.

The Group kicked off their own engagement in research by participating in conversations around technological advances in artificial intelligence (AI) and robotics in healthcare and sharing their views on social health, unmet need and inequality in dementia care. Participants contributed to discussions with researchers from different projects, informing their studies and supporting them to consider their work from a lived experience perspective.

The second day of the meeting brought more opportunities to support ongoing research. The opening session focused on supporting doctoral students to develop their approaches to supporting people with dementia to live at home for as long as possible with appropriate care. Participants were invited to share their experiences to help the researchers understand more about the impact of dementia on relationships, the changing needs of the home living environment and how people with dementia and their carers navigate the challenges of accessing care and support in the community.

The afternoon session started by providing an opportunity for people with dementia to share their insights into improving care services. This included thinking about how to improve the accessibility of information and improving the quality of community-based activities and supports.

The final session returned to a focus on research as members of the European Working Group were invited to contribute to the development of an online survey to understand more about the public's views about participating in dementia research. Members shared their thoughts on how to engage the public on this vital issue and will continue to support the delivery of this survey which is due to be launched in 2025.



After all the hard work was finished, the trip to Brussels was rounded off with a visit to the local Christmas market. Margaret took in the sights and sounds of all that the city has to offer at this time of the year including enjoying the lights in La Grand-Place, a stroll to see Manneken Pis (a Belgian institution!) and, of course, a browse around the chocolate shops.

While the trip went well, Margaret faced a challenge accessing Assisted Travel at Brussels Airport on the return journey. Margaret was advised by the Assisted Travel team that she would be unable to travel through the airport with her supporter so was left with the choice of using Assisted Travel accompanied by a stranger, or making her way through the airport with her supporter but without the additional support of the Assisted Travel team. Margaret chose to travel with her companion, without any additional assistance throughout the remainder of her journey, including a stopover in Zurich before flying back to Edinburgh. This issue will be raised with the organiser in an effort to ensure that new processes are considered by the airport and that future travellers can have a better experience with Assisted Travel.



Margaret with Alzheimer Scotland  
Policy Lead, Vicki Cahill

