

ELSA JTC2020

Optimizing the aging Brain? Situating Ethical Aspects of Dementia Prevention (BEAD)



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Background: Dementia (the most common form is Alzheimer's disease) has for a long time been conceived of as an unpreventable process of mental deterioration. Now, however, researchers claim that one out of three dementia cases can be prevented if at least nine risk factors are managed. These risk factors include some that have not been traditionally linked to Alzheimer's, such as diabetes, hypertension, social isolation, and hearing loss, and which require management over the life course, making prevention a lifelong endeavour. Early detection through biomarkers and digital tracking technologies have also become a central feature of what we call 'the new dementia'. This raises a number of ethical questions, such as: should individuals be considered personally responsible for their own dementia prevention? Should we accept extensive monitoring of our cognitive functions through digital technologies? What does dementia prevention entail for our healthcare systems and cultures of care? And, do national or local contexts play a role in how prevention is articulated and lived? *Objectives:* We propose a research project that studies in three countries the way the 'new dementia' is being articulated, and asks what ethical problems are arising, what the impacts are on health-related and everyday practices, and what solutions might be envisioned.

Methodologies: We will study the 'new dementia' through complementary disciplinary approaches. We will adopt a comparative perspective looking at differences and similarities between three countries: Germany, Canada and Switzerland.

Expected outcomes: Our results aim to make people more aware that preventing dementia is a highly complex issue that needs to be seen in context through an extensive knowledge transfer on multiple levels.

