Industry and academia throughout Europe have joined forces in a bid to defuse the dementia time bomb.

The European Prevention of Alzheimer’s Disease (EPAD) Initiative will test innovative treatments. It is part of the Innovative Medicines Initiative, a joint undertaking between the European Union and the European Federation of Pharmaceutical Industries and Associations (EFPIA). EPAD and its 35 research partners from industry and academia want to improve the chance of successfully preventing the condition. The effort will ensure the speedy identification and referral of concerned patients and allow several treatment options to be tested rapidly. EPAD is to establish a European-wide register of 24,000 participants, of which 1,500 will be invited to participate in a trial to test new treatments.

Dementia is a gradual decline in how the brain functions. It slowly interferes with a person’s ability to carry out the normal tasks of daily living. There are around 40,000 living with dementia in Ireland and the number is expected to increase significantly in the coming years. 68,216 will have the condition by 2021 and 132,000 by 2041. The five-year EPAD programme has been welcomed by the Alzheimer Society of Ireland who described it as a game changer. Chief executive, Gerry Martin, described the research programme as a significant and welcome development.

More than six out of 10 people with dementia (63%) in Ireland live at home. Most are cared for by a family member.