

Helen Rochford-Brennan LLM

Biography 2023

Helen Rochford-Brennan is a Global Dementia Ambassador who has made significant contributions to the field of dementia advocacy and research. She has been actively involved in numerous organizations and initiatives dedicated to raising awareness of dementia and promoting the rights of people living with Alzheimer's disease and other forms of dementia.

Helen's involvement in the dementia field began as the Chair and later Vice Chair of the Irish Dementia Working Group. She also served as the Chair of the European Working Group of People with Dementia, where she represented the group on the Board of Alzheimer Europe. In recognition of her dedication and impact, Helen recently received an award for her ten years of active involvement in these organizations.

Currently, Helen serves as a Board Member of the Alzheimer Europe Foundation and is a member of the Monitoring Committee for Ireland's first National Dementia Strategy. She is also a panel member of the WHO Global Dementia Observatory Knowledge Exchange, European Medicines Agency. In addition, Helen is a member of the International Advisory Board for Alzheimer's Disease International (ADI) 2023 and contributes as a member of the Health Research Board GP Primary Care Clinical Trials at the University of Ireland Galway.

Helen's commitment to making a difference extends beyond the dementia field. She is a member of the Advisory Group on the Passenger Rights Commission for Aviation and the PPI Ignite Public Advisory Board. Moreover, she supports various research projects with the Global Brain Health Institute and collaborates with organizations such as the Global Coalition on Aging, EU Mental Health, World Dementia Council, Office on Human Rights and Equality, and Decision Support Service.

Throughout her involvement with these organizations, Helen has tirelessly campaigned to raise awareness of dementia and promote a rights-based approach. She actively engages with the media, delivers speeches at international conferences, collaborates with pharmaceutical companies, scientists, clinicians, educators, students, and contributes to numerous research projects. Helen strongly advocates for Public Patient Involvement, encouraging researchers to collaborate directly with individuals living with the illness to shape research questions and priorities.

Before dedicating herself to dementia advocacy, Helen had a successful career as a businessperson, holding senior executive positions in the USA and UK. After returning to Ireland, she opened her own business and actively participated in community development, particularly in the disability sector.

In 2012, Helen received a life-changing diagnosis of Alzheimer's disease after a five-year struggle with the brain disorder. Since then, she has written extensively about her personal experience of living with the illness. Helen hopes that her active participation in research efforts will contribute to finding a cure and ultimately improve the lives of those affected by dementia.

Throughout her life, Helen has been a dedicated advocate for social justice and human rights. Today, she continues to champion the rights of people with dementia, with a particular focus on Alzheimer's disease. She serves as a co-trainer for the biannual program called "Implementing the Assisted Decision-Making (Capacity) Act: Making it Work in Practice" at the University of Galway Centre for Disability Law and Policy. Helen contributes to SPRINK in various capacities, providing a patient perspective in the development and implementation of Value-Based Health Care (VBHC) strategies for healthcare systems and life science companies. She also plays a role in designing and delivering VBHC education programs in collaboration with healthcare systems and universities.

Helen's remarkable work has been recognized through several awards, including an Honorary Doctor of Laws degree from the University of Galway for her advocacy on the rights of people with dementia. She has been honoured as one of Ireland's Most Inspiring People and has received a Business Lifetime Achievement Award and her home County have given her the Spirit of Sligo Award.

In addition to her advocacy work, Helen has made valuable contributions to various publications. She has contributed to books such as "Dementia and Human Rights" and "Perspectives on the Person with Dementia and Family Caregiving in Ireland". Helen also contributed to "Global Perspectives on Legal Capacity Reform" and "Our Voices Our Stories". Furthermore, she wrote the foreword for "Remote and Rural Dementia" as well as "Early Psychosocial Interventions".

Helen's inspiring journey and expertise have led her to participate in several documentaries and films in collaboration with organizations such as the Global Brain Health Institute, Trinity College Dublin, University of California San Francisco, WHO Mental Health, and the European Commission Mental Health. She is currently featured in a global documentary called "Keys Bags Names Words" produced by the Global Brain Health Institute. Helen continues to actively contribute to various research projects worldwide, leaving an indelible mark in the fight against dementia.