



Dementia

-the ninth National Health Priority

*Extracted from report Dementia in Australia
Released September 2012*

What is dementia?

Dementia is not a single specific disease. It is an umbrella term describing a syndrome associated with more than 100 different diseases that are characterised by the impairment of brain functions, including language, memory, perception, personality and cognitive skills. Although the type and severity of symptoms and their pattern of development varies with the type of dementia, it is usually of gradual onset, progressive in nature and irreversible.

What is the most common type?

Alzheimer disease is the most common type of dementia, accounting for about 50% to 75% of dementia cases worldwide. It is characterised by short-term memory loss, apathy and depression in the early stages. Onset is gradual and decline is progressive. This form is most common among older people with dementia, particularly among women.

Who has dementia?

- An estimated 298,000 Australians had dementia in 2011, of whom 62% were women, 74% were aged 75 and over, and 70% lived in the community.
- The number of people with dementia is estimated to reach around 400,000 by 2020 and 900,000 by 2050.
- There were an estimated 23,900 Australians under the age of 65 with dementia in 2011.
- Dementia was the third leading cause of death in 2010 behind ischaemic heart diseases and cerebrovascular diseases.
- Dementia was recorded as the underlying cause of 9,003 deaths across Australia—on average, 25 people died from dementia every day.
- In 2011, dementia was responsible for an estimated 4% of the total disease burden in Australia and was the fourth leading cause of burden of disease.
- For people aged 65 and over, dementia was the second leading cause of burden of disease and the leading cause of disability burden, accounting for a sixth of the total disability burden in older Australians in 2011.
- Among people living in the community, those with dementia were most likely to need help with health care (84%), mobility (80%) and private transport (80%). For those in cared accommodation, 99% required help with health care, 98% with self-care activities, and 91% with cognitive or emotional tasks.
- Estimates suggest that around 200,000 Australians were carers of a person with dementia living in the community in 2011.

Discussion questions

What are some of the implications the estimated increases will have on Australia?

Why do you think the Government has named Dementia as the ninth NHPA?

Dementia was added to the National Health Priority Areas (NHPA)

On 10 August 2012, Australian health ministers recognised dementia as the **ninth NHPA**. According to the Australian Government, this will:

- help focus attention and research effort on dementia
- drive collaborative efforts aimed at tackling dementia at national, local, and state and territory government levels
- support collaboration with non-government organisations, health experts, clinicians and consumers.