

# HEALTH REPORT

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- **EMBARGOED UNTIL MONDAY 18 FEBRUARY 2008** -

## AUSTRALIANS WANT DEMENTIA EARLY WARNING

New research published in the latest Pfizer Australia Health Report has found that almost three quarters of all Australians would take a test (if available) to reveal if they are going to develop Alzheimer's or another form of dementia, shedding some light on their health in older age.

The research shows that, on average, people would like to know by the age of 41 if they will develop Alzheimer's or another form of dementia and women are more likely than men to want to be informed.

According to the National Executive Director of Alzheimer's Australia, Glenn Rees, these findings are surprising and encouraging: "Early diagnosis of those most at risk is increasingly important, particularly as new treatments that modify the progression of dementia become available. We strongly support early diagnosis because it enables people with dementia to make decisions about their finances and future care, before their decision making capacity becomes impaired."

But while the number of Australians with dementia, including Alzheimer's, is expected to increase dramatically in line with our ageing population, the majority are doing little to prepare for it.

The research reveals that, despite wanting to know if they will develop Alzheimer's or dementia, almost two thirds of Australians between 51 and 60 years of age have not discussed their future care arrangements with family or friends and almost one in five of all Australians in the same age group do not have any legal or financial planning arrangements in place for later in life.

Currently, without any cure, Alzheimer's and other forms of dementia most commonly affect people over the age of 65 but can develop in people as young as 35.

"It's crucial that community attitudes start to change through people becoming better informed about the importance of advance planning for their health, their money and future care and how to set about it," explained Mr Rees.

Almost half of all Australians (47 percent) know a family member or friend who has Alzheimer's or another form of dementia and, encouragingly, 90 percent feel there is something that can be done to reduce their risk of developing the disease. In spite of this, however, 48 percent don't know whether medication can help in treating the condition.

"It's positive to learn that so many Australians feel that they can do something to reduce their risk of developing dementia such as Alzheimer's but concerning that so few actually know how. These results argue strongly for a national initiative to promote a greater understanding of the contribution lifestyle changes may make to reducing the risk of dementia," Mr Rees noted.



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Only 41 percent were able to correctly identify reducing high blood pressure as a possible preventative measure and high cholesterol was recognised as a leading risk factor by just 35 percent of Australians. Both high blood pressure and high cholesterol are risk factors for heart disease which has strong links to the development of Alzheimer's and other forms of dementia.

But it was not all bad news. Compared to the results from a 2004 survey, 18 percent more Australians believe that staying mentally active might help reduce their risk of developing dementia (84 percent up from 66 percent) and 25 percent more believe reducing or quitting smoking may help to reduce their risk (52 percent up from 27 percent). Just over two thirds of Australians also believe that adopting a healthy lifestyle may help to prevent dementia, which includes eating a healthy diet, staying socially active and connected, and exercising regularly. Encouragingly, the results also showed that fewer Australians feel that there is nothing that can be done to reduce their risk of developing dementia (10 percent down from 29 percent).

Sadly, just over one in two Australians feel that people with dementia are unfairly treated or discriminated against because of their condition. "This finding confirms the stigma surrounding dementia which needs to be overcome through improved public awareness and better access to support programs, which help people lead as normal a life as possible after diagnosis," said Mr Rees.

The independent survey was conducted by Stollznow Research in October 2007 and based on responses from 1,380 Australians.

Alzheimer's Australia has partnered with Pfizer Australia to assist with raising the awareness of Alzheimer's and other forms of dementia through this month's edition of the Pfizer Australia Health Report. For information on dementia or available services, contact the National Dementia Helpline on 1800 100 500 or visit [www.alzheimers.org.au](http://www.alzheimers.org.au)

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**NB: INTERVIEWS AVAILABLE WITH NATIONAL EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR OF ALZHEIMER'S AUSTRALIA  
GLENN REES**

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