

HEALTH REPORT

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DEMENTIA IMPACTS ON NEARLY ONE MILLION CARERS

New research released today points to record numbers of Australian lives being touched by dementia.

The research - conducted for Alzheimer's Australia and published in the latest edition of the Pfizer Australia Health Report - shows that nearly one million Australians are now involved in caring for a family member or friend with dementia.

Nearly 40 percent of these Australians believe that they are providing "a lot of care" for the 170,000 people living with the disease.

National Executive Director of Alzheimer's Australia, Glenn Rees, said the widespread impact of dementia was reflected in both the 46 percent of respondents knowing someone with the condition and their marked level of concern about developing dementia.

The ageing of our population means half a million Australians are expected to have dementia by 2040.

"That's why it is critical that Australians are well informed about the condition and the availability of support and medications," Mr Rees said.

"More than half the respondents to the research were unaware of any medications or drugs that could reduce the effects of dementia".

An overwhelming 94 percent of Australians say they would approach their doctor if concerned about the memory function of a family member or friend.

"This is consistent with other Australian and overseas evidence about the role of the general practitioner, yet there is also evidence that GPs need more training and specialist support in the diagnosis and ongoing care management of dementia patients," said Mr Rees.

The research also shows that 31 percent of Australians are either "concerned" or "very concerned" that they will develop dementia. More women and people who know someone with dementia express concern. The biggest impact though was found with age - as age increases people are more concerned about developing the condition.

"It is important that people with concerns get advice and recognise the benefits of early intervention," said Mr Rees.

The Good News

Until recently, according to Alzheimer's Australia, dementia was often considered to be a normal part of ageing.

"The research findings suggest that people are beginning to understand that there are things that they can do which may reduce the risk of developing dementia," said Mr Rees.

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HEALTH REPORT

www.healthreport.com.au

-2-

Two thirds of Australians think that keeping mentally active may be important in reducing the risk of developing dementia. The research also shows a high recognition that exercise, reduced smoking, reduced high blood pressure and reduced high cholesterol might also reduce risk.

"In short, there is a recognition that what was good for the heart might also be good for the head", said Mr Rees.

"This is good news because it shows a greater understanding that while there is still no cure for dementia, people can help themselves by looking after themselves, even though more scientific study is needed about the causes of dementia," he added.

"Overall, the research suggested a shift in community attitudes towards dementia over the last 10 to 20 years. People are starting to realise that the key is to intervene early, get advice and good support."

Information about dementia

To assist the education process, Alzheimer's Australia has joined with Pfizer Australia to produce the Pfizer Health Report on Dementia. The Report is available free of charge and contains information on the research, types of dementia and useful contacts for families and carers. A copy can be obtained by calling 1800 675 229 or by visiting www.healthreport.com.au or contacting Alzheimer's Australia.

A visit to the Alzheimer's Australia website www.alzheimers.org.au will provide a wealth of additional information. Or call their Dementia Helpline on 1800 639 331.

The findings on Australian attitudes towards Alzheimer's disease and dementia are based on polling of 1469 people aged 16 years and over in 805 households conducted nationally in March 2004 by independent consultants Stollznow Research.

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NB: INTERVIEWS WITH EXPERTS OR CARERS IN EACH STATE ARE AVAILABLE.

**FOR MORE INFORMATION PLEASE CONTACT:
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AT HAUSMANN COMMUNICATIONS ON (02) 9361 3777.**

