

4 Dementia as a Priority Area

Australia's population is ageing rapidly. Whilst most older Australians live productive and independent lives, many are troubled by the diseases associated with ageing. Dementia is one of the major issues facing an ageing Australia, it is one of the two leading causes of years of life lost due to disability and by the year 2016 will be the leading cause of disability in women. Dementia is the sixth major cause of total disability adjusted life years lost in Australia. There are currently 170,000 people in Australia living with dementia – by 2041 this figure can be expected to rise to 500,000. The burden of this illness is borne by carers of people with dementia and the societal cost of care and treatment.

The Australian Society for Geriatric Medicine believes that there should be a national concerted effort to take on the problem of dementia in Australia along the following lines:

1. Dementia should be made a National Health Priority
2. Increased funding for research in dementia. This funding is required for all types of research ranging from basic research as to the biological causes of the common forms of dementia, through to clinical studies of prevention and treatment, through to the best methods to provide clinical and community services.
3. Carer support services should be strengthened by ongoing commitments from government.
4. The Health workforce, including general practitioners, needs better training and education in the management of people with dementia.
5. Acute hospitals should be made "age friendly", with the specific needs of people with dementia accommodated in design and services.
6. There should be increased access for people with dementia to well-resourced assessment and rehabilitation services.
7. Residential care facilities need better resourcing and training in the care and management of people with dementia
8. Federal and State governments need to recognize the important role of carers. All levels of government need to work together in the provision of services to carers of people living with dementia, especially respite services.



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