



# Important information about dementia for GPs

If you are a **healthcare professional** who supports people living with dementia or mild cognitive impairment, Dementia Australia is here to **support you** and your patients.

## This resource outlines:



Changes in memory, thinking and mood.



The importance of early diagnosis and support.



Tools patients can use to monitor changes in cognition over time.



The importance of post-diagnostic support.



Programs and further education for healthcare professionals.

## Need support now?

- Call: **National Dementia Helpline** on **1800 100 500**
- Visit: [dementia.org.au/referral](https://dementia.org.au/referral) to make a quick, online referral.

# Changes in memory, thinking and mood



Changes in memory, thinking and mood have a number of possible causes that may include:

- stress
- depression
- pain
- medication or alcohol use
- mild cognitive impairment or early signs of dementia.

**Significant changes are not normal at any age and should be taken seriously.**

There are resources and tools you can recommend to patients to monitor and maintain their brain health at home.

There are screening tools you can use in-clinic to assess changes in cognition.

## Early screening and timely diagnosis is vital



If symptoms are caused by dementia or mild cognitive impairment, early diagnosis will help your patient access treatment, support and information sooner. They can adjust to changes impacting their daily life, to maximise quality of life and plan for the future.

For many people, cognitive assessment, and testing for dementia, can take months, even years. This may be caused by:

- delayed presentation of symptoms, due to the patient's lack of awareness or understanding of symptoms, or feelings of stigma associated with cognitive changes
- delayed in-clinic screening and/or referrals to specialist testing.

GPs can improve early and timely diagnosis by:

- learning more about dementia and the different ways symptoms can present
- encouraging positive conversations about changes in cognition and the benefits of early testing
- initiating dementia screening when symptoms first appear, or include cognitive screening as part of a patient's regular healthcare assessment.



There are many cognitive screening and assessment tools available, including:

- CogDrisk: Cognitive health and dementia risk assessment tool
- GPCOG: General Practitioner assessment of cognition
- MMSE: Mini-Mental State Examination
- RUDAS: Rowland Universal Dementia Assessment Scale
- KICA: Kimberley Indigenous cognitive assessment.

**If you would like a second opinion about a patient's presenting symptoms, consider making a referral to a memory clinic or cognitive medical specialist.**

# Patients can monitor and maintain their brain health using the BrainTrack app



Did you know:

- Changes in the brain may begin up to 20 years before the first noticeable signs of cognitive impairment.
- A combination of medical and lifestyle factors significantly influence our risk of developing dementia.
- Brain health is important at every life stage.
- Approximately 1 in 10 Australians over the age of 65 live with dementia and approximately 1 in 3 over the age of 85.
- Over 30,000 Australians are living with younger onset dementia (diagnosed before the age of 65).

BrainTrack, a free app developed by Dementia Australia, helps people monitor brain health and learn about lifestyle factors that may increase the risk of developing dementia.

App users play a series of games and challenges, refreshed every month. BrainTrack collects data about the user's brain health and suggests modifiable lifestyle changes to maintain brain, body and heart health.

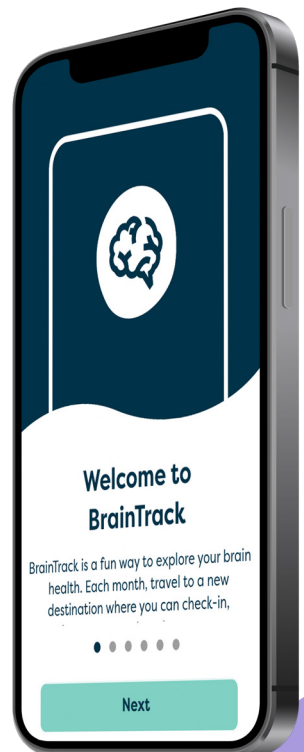
App users also receive a report that highlights any concerns with specific areas of cognition they can share and discuss with their GP.

As your patient's GP, you can use the **BrainTrack** report to:

- have a conversation together about changes to cognition
- provide access to health information and health promotion programs
- initiate in-clinic cognitive screening to identify any problems
- refer your patient for additional diagnostic assessment.

BrainTrack should be recommended to patients aged 40 years or older as a brain-health education and dementia risk reduction tool.

**BrainTrack** can be downloaded from the [App Store](#) (iPhone) or [Google Play](#) (Android).



## The importance of post-diagnostic support



Your patient can maintain their wellbeing, independence and quality of life with the right healthcare team and support, including:

- you, as their GP
- medical specialists, such as geriatricians, neurologists and psychiatrists
- Allied health professionals, such as counsellors, dieticians, occupational therapists and physiotherapists
- Dementia Australia.

As your patient's GP, it's important to have a coordinated approach and a clear plan for ongoing treatment and support.

All chronic diseases, including dementia, require constant adjustments both practically and psychologically. This includes responding quickly to changing symptoms and situations, applying strategies to live well with dementia and knowing how to take charge and manage dementia.

**It's also important that family members and people in a caring role receive support too.**



## Dementia Australia services

Dementia Australia is funded to be a key part of a pathway to diagnosis and support. We can support your patients with early, reliable and expert information, advice and support programs to help your patients take charge and maintain their quality of life.

Our services include:

- **National Dementia Helpline**

A free and confidential service, available 24/7 to anyone seeking information, advice, practical support, and counselling.

Call: **1800 100 500**

- An extensive range of information resources, available in many languages.

Visit: **[dementia.org.au](https://www.dementia.org.au)**

- Post-diagnostic early intervention programs to help people with a diagnosis, and their families, learn more about their condition, and ways to live well, get support and plan ahead.
- Confidential counselling for individuals and family members.
- Peer support programs and support groups.
- Connecting people to key services such as **My Aged Care**, the **NDIS** and **Carer Gateway**.



## How to connect patients to Dementia Australia

- Call the **National Dementia Helpline:**  
**1800 100 500**
- Make a quick online referral:  
**[dementia.org.au/referral](https://dementia.org.au/referral)**

## Support and education for health professionals



Dementia Australia offers a range of health professional education programs, tools and resource links, including:

- **The Dementia Learning Hub** online education programs, discussion forums and information resources:  
[dementialearning.org.au/courses/online-learning](https://dementialearning.org.au/courses/online-learning)
- **Professional development** courses and workshops:  
[dementialearning.org.au/education](https://dementialearning.org.au/education)
- Links to screening tools, health professional resources, and dementia service guides:  
[dementia.org.au/resources/health-professionals](https://dementia.org.au/resources/health-professionals)
- Monthly updates via our health professional newsletter. To register, go to:  
[dementia.org.au/gp-signup](https://dementia.org.au/gp-signup)

# National Dementia Helpline

## 1800 100 500



For language assistance  
call **131 450**

Find us online  
**dementia.org.au**



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