

Interim First Nations Aged Care Commissioner

June 2023

Dementia Australia

Dementia Australia is the peak dementia advocacy organisation in Australia.

Our organisation engages with people with dementia, their families and carers in our activities, planning, policy and decision-making, ensuring we capture the diversity of the living experience of dementia across Australia.

Our advocacy amplifies the voices of people living with dementia by sharing their stories and helping inform and inspire others. As the trusted source of information, education, and support services, we advocate for positive change for people living with dementia, their families and carers, and support vital research across a range of dementia-related fields.

Dementia Australia is an associate member of the National Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Ageing and Aged Care Council (NATSIAACC).

Dementia Australia acknowledges the Traditional Owners of Country throughout Australia and recognises their continuing connection to lands, waters and communities. We pay our respect to their Elders past and present and extend that respect to all Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples today.

The Dementia Australia Policy team can be contacted on policyteam@dementia.org.au

Dementia in Australia

Dementia is the term used to describe the symptoms of a large group of complex neurocognitive conditions which cause progressive decline in a person's functioning.

Dementia is not just memory loss - symptoms can also include changes in speech, reasoning, visuospatial abilities, emotional responses, social skills and physical functioning. There are many types of dementia, including Alzheimer's disease, vascular dementia, frontotemporal dementia and Lewy body disease.

The physical and cognitive changes associated with dementia will vary for each individual and require a responsive approach to every aspect of dementia care and support, including involvement in decision-making.

In 2024, it is estimated there are more than 421,000 people living with all forms of dementia. This figure is projected to increase to more than 812,500 by 2054.ⁱ More than 1.6 million people in Australia are involved in the care of someone living with dementia.ⁱⁱ

Dementia is the leading cause of disease burden among Australians aged 65 and over.ⁱⁱⁱ Dementia is the second leading cause of death for Australians and the leading cause of death of women.^{iv}

Although there are no national estimates of the number of First Nations people with dementia, studies have regularly found that dementia prevalence rates are about 3-5 times as high as rates for Australia overall.^v First Nations communities may also have an increased prevalence of some risk factors for dementia including head injury, stroke, diabetes, high blood pressure, renal disease, cardiovascular disease, obesity, hearing loss, childhood stress and trauma, and lower socioeconomic status.^{vi}

Interim First Nations Aged Care Commissioner

Dementia Australia would like to express our support for the Interim First Nations Aged Care Commissioner and current consultation process regarding aged care services for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities. We are grateful for the opportunity to contribute feedback.

Many older Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people have experienced significant trauma, such as the Stolen Generation and other welfare interventions. These experiences have lasting impacts and influence their interactions with aged care services.

There is a pressing need for more Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander staff in aged care facilities to provide culturally safe and sensitive care. Care plans should be person-centred and culturally tailored, considering individual histories, languages, and preferences. Aged care providers should aim to understand the personal and cultural histories of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander residents to provide more tailored and respectful care. It is also essential that Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander staff in home and residential aged care are educated in dementia.

We support the establishment of a permanent, First Nations Aged Care Commissioner. We believe that the role is essential for creating an inclusive, culturally safe, and responsive aged care system that provides quality dementia care for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people. The role should be supported by a group of representatives of older people, including people living with dementia and

carers, from different states and territories to capture the diverse perspectives of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities across Australia.

Dementia Australia welcomes the opportunity for any further consultation.

ⁱ Dementia Australia (2023) Dementia Prevalence Data 2024-2054, commissioned research undertaken by the Australian Institute of Health and Welfare instead of Australian Institute of Health and Welfare (2022) Dementia in Australia, AIHW, Australian Government, accessed 20 January 2023.

ⁱⁱ Based on Dementia Australia's analysis of the following publications - Department of Health and Aged Care, 2020 Aged Care Workforce Census Report, 2020, p. 6; Australian Institute of Health and Welfare (2022) Dementia in Australia, AIHW, Australian Government, accessed 20 January 2023

ⁱⁱⁱ Australian Institute of Health and Welfare (2024) Dementia in Australia

^{iv} Australian Institute of Health and Welfare (2024) Dementia in Australia

^v Australian Institute of Health and Welfare (2024) Population health impacts of dementia among First Nations people

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