In 2007, the Australian Government funded the Northern Territory Dementia Behaviour Management Advisory Service (NT DBMAS) to develop guidelines on behaviours related to dementia that impact on care provision; these guidelines cover Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander cultural considerations.

The guidelines accompany the existing Best Practice Guidelines for Behaviour Management, used by DBMAS in each state and territory.

Information about cultural considerations was gathered from focus groups and individuals using a questionnaire, with a key cultural advisor identified in each of the communities for follow-up contact.

Aboriginal & Torres Strait Islander cultural considerations: Behavioural and Psychological Symptoms of Dementia.

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The focus groups conducted in remote NT & WA were comprised of aged care workers, family carers of people with dementia and interested health professionals.

The assistance of Frontier Services Aged & Community Care in making initial links was important.

A focus group was also held on Thursday Island to ensure that the guidelines are appropriate for both Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander clients.

Further cultural advice was provided by the Alzheimer's Australia National Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Liaison Officer and NT Aboriginal Health Workers involved in aged care. Geriatricians and Psycho-geriatricians from around Australia were also consulted.
Over 200 elders, researchers, academics, government representatives and service providers met recently at the Australian Association of Gerontology National Workshop Growing Old Well: A life cycle approach for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Peoples to examine strategies aimed at improving the health of Aboriginal people across the life span.

Specific focus areas that were discussed include early maternal nutrition; mid life factors and the role of chronic health conditions; healthy ageing and issues regarding appropriate service provision.

Another focus area investigated issues around emerging research questions and determined strategies on how to work with communities to find the answers.

“The thing we are trying to get across is that to age successfully in this century, you are going to have to have a good mind, grow it and protect it,” said Professor Tony Broe, Director of the Koori Growing Old Well Study based at the Prince of Wales Medical Research Institute.

“This is especially important in Indigenous communities where there has been a long history of separation and structural barriers to health, housing, education, and early development - all those other things that most people take for granted in Australian society today.”

Associate Professor Lisa Jackson Pulver, University of NSW, said that Indigenous people are starting to turn the tide on early mortality rates. “While we hear a lot about Indigenous life expectancies being shorter than those of non-Indigenous people, that is only part of the story,” she said. “Aboriginal people are growing old. It’s just that there are only a small proportion of us who get there,” she concluded.

For more information and to see video of the workshop visit www.powmri.edu.au

In May 2008, Alzheimer’s Australia Vic formed an Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Liaison Group to help improve access for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people to programs and support for people with dementia and their carers throughout Victoria.

The Group aims to work with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities to develop policies; raise awareness of dementia; promote risk reduction strategies; and provide training for health workers about dementia and cultural considerations for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people with dementia and their families and carers.

Alzheimer’s Australia Vic currently works with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities and organisations in Bendigo; Swan Hill; Dareton; Darebin; Mildura; Robinvale; Murray Valley; and Melbourne. Through learning about local culture, these partnerships are assisting the development of dementia training that takes account of local needs.

Alzheimer’s Australia Vic is also building relationships with organisations such as the Victorian Aboriginal Community Controlled Health Organisation (VACCHO).

For more information about ATSI programs in Victoria please contact Natalijia Nesvadba on 03 9815 7800.
My name is Jennifer Hayes; I am a Kuyani and Aranda woman. I was brought up to respect my culture and its people. I come from a family of seven, and was born in Port Augusta and lived there until 1996.

In January 2008, I joined Alzheimer’s Australia SA (AASA) in the position of Aboriginal Liaison Officer (ALO). This is a Home and Community Care (HACC) funded position and is in partnership with the Aboriginal Drug and Alcohol Council SA.

As the ALO, I am primarily responsible for raising awareness of dementia and the work of Alzheimer’s Australia amongst Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people in SA.

I am committed to ensuring that all Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people receive fair and equitable service, and I look forward to working with both mainstream and Aboriginal agencies in meeting the needs of the community.

I am also a member of the Alzheimer’s Australia National Aboriginal Torres Strait Islander Dementia Advisory Group (NATSIDAG) and the Metro Advisory Group for the Strengthening Dementia Care in Indigenous Communities Project.

During my time with AASA, I have been working out in the communities of Port Augusta, Coober Pedy, Murray Bridge and Adelaide metro.

Some of the groups that I have met with are the Adelaide OATSIH, Metro Mob, Elders group, Murra Dreaming, Muna Pinedie, Aboriginal Outreach Health Services, Flinders Hospital Aboriginal Unit, Office for Women, Aboriginal Outreach Health Services, Pt August, Noarlunga Health, and Lower Nunga Murray Health Club Murray Bridge.

AASA is committed to ensuring that the needs of Aboriginal communities are addressed within the provision of mainstream services. By working in partnership with communities and Aboriginal agencies, we aim to address these needs, raise awareness and improve community understanding of dementia and the associated issues.

To contact Jenny Hayes call 08 8372 2100 or email Jennyh@alzheimerssa.asn.au

Recognition in the Mentor International Prevention Awards

In March 2008, Alzheimer’s Australia SA (AASA) submitted the “Strengthening Dementia Care in Indigenous Communities” project to the Mentor International Prevention Awards.

The project is a collaborative effort between AASA and the Aboriginal Drug and Alcohol Council that is funded through the AER Foundation. The project, aimed at Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities in South Australia, particularly focuses on raising awareness of dementia and prevention amongst youth in the communities.

During its 12 months of operation, the project has reached out to communities from Adelaide to Ceduna in the North West and Mt Gambier in the South East, with some excellent results.

Although unsuccessful for an award, the project received an Honourable Mention and was the only entry from Australia to receive any recognition.

For more information about this project contact Mark Elliot
phone: 08 8372 2100 or