Alzheimer’s Australia has launched an Australian-first dementia risk reduction program for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities, in response to growing dementia prevalence.

Dementia affects Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people earlier in life, with 73 percent of dementia cases amongst Aboriginal Australians occurring between the age of 60 and 70; compared to 70+ years for the majority of non-Aboriginal Australians.

Chair of the National Aboriginal and Torre Strait Island Dementia Advisory Group (NATSIDAG), Fred Tanner said any reduction in prevalence or delay in the onset of dementia can help preserve a person’s connection to country, family and self.

“Delaying or preventing the loss of many of the stories and traditions that are carried verbally through generations can have a considerable impact on the community” Mr Tanner said.

“The Your Brain Matters program aims to improve the brain health of all Australians. There is no cure for dementia, but we know that keeping mentally stimulated, fit and healthy and looking after our hearts can help reduce the risk of cognitive decline.”

Alzheimer’s Australia CEO, Glenn Rees said the greater dementia prevalence heralds the growing gap between the health and wellbeing of Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal Australians, noting that preliminary results from the Koori Growing Old Well Study - a census of all resident Aboriginal people aged 60+, across five urban and regional Indigenous communities - found that the prevalence of dementia over 60 years is more than 13 percent in Aboriginal Australians and 21 percent when adjusted for the younger age of the Indigenous population.

“This is three times the general Australian rate of 6.8 percent,” Mr Rees said.
The resources include culturally relevant brochures and a video presented by respected members of Aboriginal communities, including Shari Sebbens from the hit film The Sapphires.

The director of ‘Your Story Matters’ Ben Graetz said “The resources have been developed with the community. Everything from the language and music used, through to the focus on preserving stories and culture, is designed by my people, for our people. It’s about encouraging conversations and prevention within the community.”

The resources are for use by relevant health workers, carers and families of Aboriginal people with dementia and were launched by director Ben Graetz in Darwin on 4 March 2014.

The Your Story Matters resource aims to communicate five main messages:

- Look after your heart: always ask staff at the clinic to check your blood pressure, cholesterol, blood sugar, weight and avoid smoking
- Keep your body active: exercise is good for the brain. Playing sports, swimming, walking and dancing helps keep your brain healthy
- Keep your brain thinking: mental exercise is good for the brain. Learn new words and skills by reading and yarning with others
- Eat a healthy balanced diet: eat two pieces of fruit and five serves of vegetables every day. Too much alcohol is bad for your health
- Mix well with others: talk to your mob, do things with your family and friends

If you would like copies of the resource, please visit the Your Brain Matters website

Alternatively, hard copies can be obtained by contacting your State or Territory Alzheimer’s Australia office.
DEMENTIA IN THE NORTHERN TERRITORY

by Chris Hatherly

A study published in the Medical Journal of Australia on May 5, 2014 has shown that the prevalence and incidence of dementia in the Northern Territory (NT) are higher than national estimates, and that these rates are approximately three times higher among Aboriginal than non-Aboriginal people.

The study was undertaken by researchers at the NT Department of Health, and used a sophisticated analysis technique to link government and medical data collected over four years from 2008. All Territorians, aged 45 and older who; were admitted to a public hospital, were assessed for aged care or disability services, died, or used one of more than 50 health centres in remote NT communities were included in the data analysis. By identifying the time and nature of any record of a dementia diagnosis in any of these data sets, the researchers were able to obtain definitive data on dementia cases for a significant proportion of the Territory’s population, and to extrapolate these findings to the remainder.

The main findings were:

- The prevalence of dementia (i.e., the total number of cases) in the NT in 2011 was estimated to be 1,033 people, or 1.6 people per 100 aged 45 and over.
- An estimated 430 Aboriginal Territorians had dementia, or 3.7 people per 100 aged 45 and older.
- In contrast, the 603 estimated cases of dementia among non-Aboriginal Territorians equated to 1.1 people per 100. Three times lower than the rate in the Aboriginal population.

The study also found that the incidence of dementia (the number of new cases each year) was higher in Aboriginal than in non-Aboriginal Territorians. This difference was particularly marked in middle-age men. Specifically, the incidence of dementia among Aboriginal men aged 45-64 was estimated to be 45.2 cases per 1000 person years (i.e., just under 1 in 20 people in this group developing dementia each year). This rate was twice as high as Aboriginal women of the same age, and more than four times higher than non-Aboriginal middle-aged men.
Michael Lowe, Community Geriatrician with the Department of Health in the Northern Territory and author on the paper said:

"With these results, what we now really need to understand more clearly are the causes behind them and how we might be able to reduce these figures."

This study builds on two smaller studies of dementia prevalence among populations in Western Australia’s Kimberly region, and in urban areas in NSW and Vic; both of which similarly showed that rates of dementia were approximately three to four times higher among Aboriginal than non-Aboriginal populations. An interesting editorial by Robert Parker also released today in the Medical Journal of Australia (click here) delves a bit further into some of the reasons behind why these figures might have been seen.

This article was produced by Chris Hatherly for the Dementia News. To view the original article please visit click here. To subscribe to the Dementia News, please visit click here.

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**ABS – ABORIGINAL AND TORRES STRAIT ISLANDER HEALTH SURVEY 2012-2013: FIRST RESULTS AVAILABLE**

In April 2012, the Australian Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Health Survey commenced across the country involving people living in remote and non-remote areas. The survey expands upon data collected about Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples in previous health surveys conducted by the ABS and includes:

- estimates of the prevalence of certain chronic diseases and conditions and selected behavioural risk factors- including physical activity participation and sedentary behaviour
- objective measures of selected chronic diseases, nutrition status and other risk factors which can be combined with self-reported data about health status and conditions (e.g. diabetes)
- health risk factors and outcomes for different population groups of interest, such as different age groups and people living in remote and non-remote areas.

Some first results from the 2012-2013 survey are now available on the ABS website:

- around two in five (39.2%) Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people aged 15 years and over considered themselves to be in very good or excellent health, while 7.2% rated their health as poor.
- one in six (17.5%) Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people had asthma
- around one in eight (12.0%) Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people had heart disease
- two in five (41.0%) Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people aged 15 years and over smoked on a daily basis.
- one in five (20.3%) Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander adults had measured high blood pressure (systolic or diastolic blood pressure equal to or greater than 140/90 mmHg).

Further information about the results and the survey can be obtained click here.
We all want to make our own decisions about what we do in life – like how to spend our money, where to live and what medical treatments to have.

Unfortunately many of us will be in a position where other people have to make decisions for us. This might happen because of a sudden accident or a progressive illness like dementia.

A new program from Alzheimer’s Australia called Start2Talk has been developed to help you to plan ahead for possible healthcare, lifestyle and financial decisions. This gives you some control over how these decisions are made if you can’t speak for yourself at some time in the future.

Planning ahead also helps your loved ones who may have to make important decisions for you in these circumstances.

“The Start2Talk website moves beyond providing information by including a number of worksheets that promote communication and help users take action related to planning ahead. It includes the ability for users to register with the website and store their worksheets online if they want to” says Dr Chris Shanley, who led a team of people in development of the website for Alzheimer’s Australia.

“It has comprehensive information and links relevant for all States and Territories as well as a section for health and community care professionals. It also includes the options of sending in your story and having your questions answered”.

The website has the support of many consumer and professional organisations within the ageing sector such as Council on the Ageing, National Seniors, Carers Australia, Consumers Health Forum, Palliative Care Australia, the Royal Australian College of General Practitioners and others.

The website was launched in February this year– so log on and be one of the first people to have a good look at www.start2talk.org.au

**NEW WEBSITE HELPS YOU CONTROL HOW FUTURE DECISIONS ARE MADE FOR YOU**

By Helena Kyriazopoulos

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**START2TALK**

visit [www.start2talk.org.au](http://www.start2talk.org.au) today
Fred is of Arabuna/Southern Arrernte and Yankunytjatjara descent from South Australia.

After leaving high school, Fred completed a Boilermaker apprenticeship before moving to Adelaide to study, completing an Associate Diploma in Community Administration and a double degree in Arts and Law.

Fred met Deb, his wife in 1989 and they married in 2001. Deb worked as an assistant Speech therapist for Spastic Centre of SA and then Novita Children’s Services until her retirement on health grounds in 2007. A job that she loved.

Deb was diagnosed with early onset Dementia in early 2008. Prior to that Fred’s journey as her Primary Carer probably started in late 2006/07 when he became aware of a number of functions that Deb was struggling with. Fred took on the role of Deb’s carer whilst holding down a fulltime job in the State public service until her placement into a nursing home on 30 May 2012. Unfortunately, Deb passed away in June 2013.

Prior to and since Deb’s passing, Fred has become an advocate for more financial investment into research for a cure, better care and services to people affected by Dementia.

Fred has told their story at conferences, in videos, such as The Fading Moon, and participated on numerous committees.

Currently, Fred is the Chairperson of the National Aboriginal Torres Strait Islander Dementia Advisory group to Alzheimer’s Australia, member of the Australia Aust SA consumers Policy Alliance group, Volunteer for Alzheimer’s Aust SA branch, the only male members of Teamtlc which consists of past or current carers who fundraise to assist people with younger onset dementia and their families.
The Australian prison population is ageing and has grown at a rate faster than the general population which has resulted in an increase in the number of people living with dementia in prisons.

This paper, released by Alzheimer’s Australia NSW, aims to raise awareness of the experiences of people living with dementia in prisons, address the needs of this group and risk factors for dementia for people living in a prison setting.

Aboriginal prisoners have a higher risk of dementia with lifestyle risk factors including traumatic brain injury, low education levels, drug and alcohol abuse and low socio-economic status prevalent in this population.

Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people account for high proportion of the prison population; in 2012, 27% of the total prisoner population are of Aboriginal and/or Torres Strait Islander decent.

Good practice in prisons include:

- access to early assessment and diagnosis
- training for corrections staff
- adapting the prison environment – signage, wall colour, handrails and non-slip floors
- coordinating services to ensure access to resources and services, and
- further research

These practices may go some way in assisting those people living with dementia in prisons. To view the report click here.

UPCOMING CONFERENCES AND EVENTS

Aboriginal Health Conference 2014
When: 5-6 July 2014
Location: Perth, Western Australia
Further information: click here

National Aborigines and Islanders Day Observance Committee (NAIDOC) Week
When: 6-13 July 2014
Location: various (check NAIDOC website link below)
Further information: click here

Congress of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Nurses and Midwives
16th National Conference and AGM
When: 23-25 September 2014
Location: Perth, Western Australia
Further information: click here

Indigenous Men and Indigenous Women back-to-back conference
When: 13-15 October 2014
Location: Cairns, Queensland
Further information: click here
ABORIGINAL AND TORRES STRAIT ISLANDER DEMENTIA HELP SHEETS

A series of help sheets about various dementia topics have been developed to inform Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people about dementia. These include:

- Memory Changes
- What is dementia?
- Diagnosing dementia
- Alzheimer’s disease
- Information for family and friends

To view the help sheets, click here

For the latest information about upcoming conferences, workshops and events look under the Dementia section on the Australian Indigenous HealthInfoNet

CONTACT NUMBERS

National Dementia Helpline

1800 100 500

Alzheimer’s Australia

1800 100 500 OR
WWW.FIGHTDEMENTIA.ORG.AU

Dementia Behaviour Management Advisory Service (DBMAS)

1800 699 799