MEDIA RELEASE
More evidence dementia should be an election priority

The latest burden of disease analysis report released today highlights the significant impact dementia is having on all Australians, especially women.

The Australian Institute of Health and Welfare (AIHW) report: Australian Burden of Disease Study: Impact and causes of illness and death in Australia 2011 compares the impact of different diseases, conditions or injuries on the Australian population.

Alzheimer’s Australia CEO Carol Bennett said, “this report confirms the huge burden of disease overall that dementia represents for all Australians. It also further confirms growing global evidence that suggests women are most affected by dementia, in terms of living with the condition but we know they are also over-represented as carers for those living with it.”

“However men follow closely behind from age 75 ranking third and from age 85 ranking second as the leading cause of disease burden,” Ms Bennett said.

“This new report highlights dementia as one of the leading chronic conditions of our age. Without leadership from all sides of politics for dementia this election, it will continue to put enormous strain on the health and aged care sectors.

“While it is not strictly a condition of ageing, our failure to manage the risk factors leading to dementia may well have placed it so highly in the ranking of burden of disease. It underlines the importance of prevention and risk reduction which can reduce this impact,” Ms Bennett said.

We know there is a link between lifestyle choices and a healthy brain. The significant body of evidence indicates there are things people in their 20s, 30s and 40s can do to reduce their risk of getting dementia. That could be, for example, reducing high blood pressure or high cholesterol levels, keeping active, eating a healthy well-balanced diet, maintaining social connections and challenging one’s brain.

Now more than ever we need to ensure dementia risk reduction messages are being heard, something a National Dementia Strategy would address. A recent survey indicated that 22% of Australians believe there is nothing you can do to reduce your risk of dementia¹.

“This is alarming and suggests Australians need to be clearly informed that their lifestyle choices do affect their risk of chronic diseases like dementia,” Ms Bennett said.

With the cost of dementia care set to outstrip any other health condition by 2060², it is essential that politicians take heed of these findings and act now by making dementia a priority in their election policy.

For more information visit Alzheimer’s Australia’s risk reduction website: Your Brain Matters

Read the Australian Burden of Disease Study: Impact and causes of illness and death in Australia 2011 here

Alzheimer’s Australia is the peak body for people with dementia and their families and carers. It provides advocacy, support services, education and information. More than 353,800 people have dementia in Australia. This number is projected to reach more than half a million by 2030.

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¹ Ipsos (2015) Perceptions and Understanding of Dementia: Report for Alzheimer’s Australia