Importance of engagement for people living with dementia during lockdowns

In light of recent restrictions and lockdowns across the country, Dementia Australia is calling on the community, including health and aged care staff, to work together to maintain engagement with people impacted by dementia during this time of enforced isolation.

Dementia Australia Acting CEO Anthony Boffa said people living with dementia are some of the most vulnerable people in our community during the COVID-19 pandemic.

“Ramping up the focus on engagement and communication at this time of restricted physical contact is vital for all of us, but especially for people living with dementia,” Mr Boffa said.

“If stimulus is reduced for people living with dementia the loss of cognitive function can escalate.

“Over time these are losses that most people will not be able to regain.

“Being aware that your cognitive abilities may ‘slip away’, as one client described it, is a profound concern.”

People living with dementia, their families and carers have told Dementia Australia that some residential aged care facilities have not been able to offer appropriate alternatives to essential visits and this has resulted in poor physical and psychological outcomes for residents with dementia.

Mr Boffa said it is crucial that all those working in aged care, especially in Victoria and New South Wales, are extra vigilant in providing care for people living with dementia to protect them from the risk of COVID-19 and social isolation.

“During this time, the aged care sector is under increasing stress. For those impacted by dementia, there will be an added layer of anxiety,” Mr Boffa said.

“With recent data suggesting that just over two thirds of all people living in residential aged care have moderate to severe cognitive impairment, this must be adequately addressed.

"It is vital that people who provide essential care to loved ones with dementia are not excluded from giving care at this time.

"People living in residential aged care have the right to assistance to stay connected with their loved ones, even when visitor restrictions are in place.

“We encourage staff to involve families wherever they can to actively plan for different forms of engagement and methods of communication.

“We are here to support the 472,000 Australians living with dementia and the 1.6 million people involved in their care. Please get in touch with our National Dementia Helpline as questions and concerns arise, on 1800 100 500 or visit dementia.org.au for webchat, resources and information in other languages.”

For more information on rights for aged care residents, their families and representatives see this fact sheet.

Dementia Australia is the source of trusted information, education and services for the estimated half a million Australians living with dementia, and the almost 1.6 million people involved in their care. We advocate for positive change and support vital research. We are here to support people impacted by dementia, and to enable them to live as well as possible. No matter how you are impacted by dementia or who you are, we are here for you.

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For support, please contact the National Dementia Helpline on 1800 100 500. An interpreter service is available and the Helpline is open 8am to 8pm Monday to Friday excluding public holidays. The National Dementia Helpline is funded by the Australian Government. People looking for information can also visit dementia.org.au

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When talking or writing about dementia please refer to Dementia-Friendly Language Guidelines.