



**Dementia
Australia®**

2024 - 2025 Pre-budget submission

January 2024

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Introduction

Dementia is one of the largest health and social challenges facing Australia and the world. It is estimated that in 2024 there will be more than 421,000 people living with all forms of dementia in Australia. This number will continue to grow to more than 812,500 by 2054¹. Dementia is now the leading cause of disease burden among Australians aged 65 and over and is the second leading cause of death for Australians and the leading cause of death of women.²

Investment in dementia policy and programs over recent budgets has been substantial - and widely welcomed by people impacted by dementia. Aged care reforms, including the new Aged Care Quality Standards and the development of a ten-year National Dementia Action Plan, are crucially important elements in achieving more consistent quality dementia care across community, health, disability and aged care services.

But there is still much to do, not least in positioning the workforce to meet their new compliance requirements around dementia capability, embedding career pathways that build attraction and retention. This is as well as continuing to educate Australians - especially those populations adversely affected by dementia - about brain health across the life cycle.

For this reason, Dementia Australia's budget proposals focus on two key elements that respond to and are informed by feedback from people impacted by dementia and other stakeholders in the health, disability and aged care sectors. The proposals also align with and offer ways forward for key priority areas in the National Dementia Action Plan.

The programs of work focus on workforce and brain health, and span:

1. building the dementia capability of the workforce - \$22,128,930
2. developing a brain health initiative for First Nations communities - \$3,500,000

Total investment: \$25,628,930 over 3 years

¹ Dementia Australia (2023) Dementia Prevalence Data 2024-2054, commissioned research undertaken by the Australian Institute of Health and Welfare

² Australian Institute of Health and Welfare (2023) Dementia in Australia, Summary, Impact <https://www.aihw.gov.au/reports/dementia/dementia-in-aus/contents/summary>

1. Build the dementia capability of the health, disability, aged care and first responders' workforces

The context

In the Progress Report: Implementation of the Recommendations of the Royal Commission into Aged Care Quality and Safety³, the Interim Inspector-General (IIG) for Aged Care noted:

“In relation to dementia-specific training, while progress has been made, the IIG is strongly of the view that further consideration of mandating dementia training for approved providers is required.”

This recommendation is echoed by Dementia Advocates and other stakeholders, who have noted that aged care reforms are beginning to address some core competencies, but that two key elements are required to support the transformation of the aged care sector: 1. investment in initiatives that build the foundational capability of the current workforce and 2. investment in initiatives that build mentoring and peer collaboration in a more effective way.

By targeting our attention on both short-term and longer-term initiatives to embed dementia capability more consistently, the proposals offered here complement the reform efforts to date and enhance their impact. For example, the new Aged Care Quality Standards will include a strengthened requirement for providers to ensure all workers regularly receive competency-based training in caring for someone with dementia, but it is important not to overestimate the baseline dementia capability of the sector in the first instance. Not everyone with a Certificate III will have completed the dementia unit of competency, the content of which was recently updated; other members of the aged care workforce may not have received any specific dementia education, despite caring for people with a cognitive impairment in community or residential aged care.

As such, it is important that the government invests in a consistent standard of foundational level of education and subsidised support to lift the baseline capacity of the aged care sector and ensure a successful sector transition to the new Standards.

Moreover, other essential services such as health, disability, police, and emergency services staff also lack adequate levels of dementia education - and we have heard of the negative impact that this shortfall in knowledge has had on community members and the staff themselves. These workforces regularly interact with a growing number of people living with dementia within the community and it is important that they too understand dementia and how to best support people living with dementia.

³ Office of the Interim Inspector-General of Aged Care (2023) Progress Report: Implementation of the Recommendations of the Royal Commission into Aged Care Quality and Safety, July 2023

The proposal

To build the dementia capability of the health, disability, aged care and first responders' workforces, Dementia Australia proposes the following:

- a. Build the foundations:** Provide essential dementia education for health, disability and aged care workforces.

Before embedding dementia competencies more consistently in our workforces, we must first build essential foundational dementia knowledge and skills for these workforces to better support people living with dementia to achieve improved health outcomes and quality of life.

The recently updated dementia unit of competency (CHCAGE011 Provide support to people living with dementia) has been designed to provide the essential background knowledge needed to work more effectively as a support provider for people with dementia. It is a core unit in CHC42015 Certificate IV in Ageing Support. The course is intended for staff in the aged care industry rather than family carers.

The underlying approach of the course is from the perspective of someone employed to provide support in a professional setting. This nationally recognised comprehensive course consists of six modules covering a range of areas including: the nature of dementia; changed behaviour; the impact of dementia; person-centred practice; effective communication; activities for engagement; identifying elder abuse and restrictive practices; creating supportive environments; and application to practice and reporting.

The format is both informative and interactive, and includes research using the internet, video content, case studies and opportunities for group discussion as well as workplace assessments. This course is highly structured, combining theory and practical components for an engaging learning experience, and can be undertaken either face to face or fully online.

Dementia Australia is currently funded to June 2025 to deliver this program as part of Dementia Training Australia to 5,200 participants per annum. Post June 2025 we would seek to continue to deliver the program to aged care as well as extend delivery into health care and first responders over two years to June 2027.

- b. Coach good practice:** Provide coaching and micro skills program for the health, disability and aged care workforce as well as first responders

Once staff have the necessary dementia knowledge and skills, they need to be supported to apply these learnings to how they approach their work. This is key to ensuring the education achieves improved practice changes and care outcomes for people living with dementia.

A coaching program combined with micro learning utilising the award-winning Ask Annie app will enable the learnings from dementia training to be applied to practice.

The program has been designed to have targeted contact hours given the staff shortages in the sector affecting the capacity of providers to release staff to attend training. It is also well suited to health and first responders where the contact with a person living with dementia may be less frequent. More targeted coaching will enable the program to be contextualised for these different settings and together with utilisation of the app providing just in time

support to these workers. The program would run over three years to June 2027 reaching 6,000 workers in that period.

The Ask Annie app is designed for self-paced microlearning. Each course is made up of different modules, supported by short videos and easy to read summaries. Interactive quizzes help support workers identify gaps in their knowledge and apply their new understanding.

Annie is a virtual support worker who provides home support for people living with dementia. She guides users through different scenarios, offering practical tips and tools to strengthen their dementia support skills. The app provides intuitive and engaging learning experiences and can be used anywhere, anytime. In the past 12 months the app has had over 8700 downloads. As part of this proposal we would actively promote use of the app alongside the coaching through to June 2027 and over this time would anticipate 15,000 downloads of the app.

c. Develop dementia practice leaders: Drive practice change through solid leadership in the aged, health and disability workforces

Leaders who can mentor good practice as well as drive practice improvement for quality dementia care are essential. An accredited learning pathway to promote specialisation in dementia care is also needed.

Dementia Australia has successfully created the (10993NAT) Certificate in Dementia Practice to address the need for more skilled dementia practice leaders to help drive practice improvements in their organisation. Strong leadership was recognised as a critical element of sustained practice improvements by the Royal Commission into Aged Care Quality and Safety

This qualification will provide participants with a range of knowledge and advanced skills to become leaders in implementing changes to practice through the engagement of workers, families, and carers to improve the lives of people living with dementia. The course focuses on the establishment of collaborative networks to ensure the effective application of knowledge of changed behaviour, reablement strategies, cognitive assessment, and screening.

The program is designed for people working in aged care, health care and community services. As this is an online program, learning can happen from anywhere with an internet connection.

This nationally recognised program contains the following 14 units of competencies:

1. Reflect on and improve own professional practice (CHCPRP003)
2. Demonstrate Leadership in the workplace (BSBLD411)
3. Lead team effectiveness (BSBLDR414)
4. Apply concepts of dementia and contemporary practice (NAT10993001)
5. Work legally and ethically (CHCLE001)
6. Contribute to dementia diagnosis through cognitive screening and assessment (NAT10993002)
7. Deliver dementia support using enablement strategies (NAT10993003)
8. Support independence and wellbeing (CHCCCS040)
9. Optimise communication for people living with dementia (Nat10993004)

10. Support changed behaviour associated with dementia (NAT10993005)
11. Work with diverse people (CHCDIV001)
12. Plan for and provide care services using a palliative approach (CHCPAL002)
13. Facilitate wellbeing of carers and self in dementia care (NAT10993006)
14. Develop and maintain dementia service networks (NAT1099007)

Dementia Australia has also worked in partnership with the Wicking Centre at the University of Tasmania who will credit eligible graduates of the Certificate Iv in Dementia Practice for one unit, the CAD117 Effective Communication for Dementia Care, within their Diploma of Dementia Care.

This will help to build an accredited professional development pathway that will hopefully contribute to career progression and boost the quality of dementia care nationally. Dementia education leads to fewer high-risk incidents, lower rates of inappropriate use of medication as well as more positive staff attitudes and morale, which ultimately results in better service delivery and quality of life for people living with dementia.

As this program is currently delivered as part of Dementia Training Australia with funding through to June 2025 this submission proposes extending the funding through to June 2027 to enable the program to reach a further 590 participants. Since the program launched in 2023 there has been strong demand for the program demonstrating the clear need for such a course.

The investment

Total cost over three years: \$22,128,930

2. Brain health across the life course for First Nations communities – reduce risk and delay onset and progression of dementia

The context

Research suggests that 40 per cent of cases of dementia could be delayed or reduced by focusing on modifiable risk factors. In September 2023 Alzheimer’s Disease International (ADI) urged governments around the world to urgently fund dementia risk-reduction research, education and support services and for governments to make risk reduction a core element of National Dementia Plans.⁴

The modifiable risk factors for dementia are low levels of education in early life; obesity in midlife; hypertension in midlife; hearing loss in midlife; tobacco smoking; excessive alcohol consumption; physical inactivity; high cholesterol; high levels of homocysteine – an amino acid produced when proteins are broken down; atrial fibrillation; diabetes; depression; social isolation; air pollution; traumatic brain injury.⁵

Although there are no national-level estimates of the number of First Nations people with dementia, studies examining different communities of First Nations people have consistently found that dementia prevalence rates are about 3–5 times as high as rates for Australia overall. The Australian Institute of Health and Welfare (AIHW) notes that evidence of higher dementia prevalence, including in younger people, suggests that without interventions to help moderate the impact of dementia, its burden among First Nations people will continue to grow in coming years. A key national research priority is to develop and evaluate culturally responsive programs, interventions and policies to reduce dementia risk factors across the life course and prevent or delay the onset of cognitive decline and dementia (including by targeting social determinants of health).⁶

The proposal

To address this, Dementia Australia proposes the establishment of a brain health initiative focused on First Nations communities that would be developed in three phases.

a. Co-design with First Nations communities

Dementia Australia’s Consumer Engagement Framework, A Stronger Voice Together, outlines our commitment to engaging meaningfully with people impacted by dementia. It is essential that this initiative is developed with First Nations communities included throughout the entirety of the project. This includes the concept, product development, implementation

⁴ Alzheimer’s Disease International (2023) World Alzheimer Report 2023. Reducing dementia risk: never too early, never too late

⁵ Livingston et.al. (2020) Dementia prevention, intervention, and care: 2020 report of the Lancet Commission, Vol 396, Issue 10248: P413-446

⁶ Australian Institute of Health and Welfare (2023) Dementia in Australia, Population health impacts of dementia among First Nations people <https://www.aihw.gov.au/reports/dementia/dementia-in-aus/contents/dementia-in-priority-groups/population-health-impacts-dementia-first-nations>

and an ongoing partnership with trusted organisations such as Aboriginal Community Controlled Health Organisations. Together with First Nations partners, we will craft a brain health program that targets First Nations peoples across the life cycle.

b. Develop app/web-based program and resources

The second phase of work will be the development of an app/web-based program and associated resources – perhaps an Indigenous version of BrainTrack or a similar concept, given the number of First Nations peoples accessing smart phones is quite high. The core aim would be the development of a culturally appropriate app with practical, cost effective and easily accessible brain health and dementia risk reduction strategies which allows people to monitor their brain health across the life course. Education programs and associated resources may also be developed.

c. Promotion and dissemination

Dementia Australia will work with First Nations community organisations to promote and disseminate the program and resources.

The process and resulting programs, apps and resources will be evaluated and the learnings used to refine the project and inform future work with First Nations communities.

The investment

Total cost over 3 years: \$3,500,000

About Dementia Australia

Dementia Australia is the national peak body for people impacted by dementia in Australia. We exist to support and empower the more than 421,000 Australians living with dementia and the more than 1.6 million people involved in their care.

Dementia is the second leading cause of death in Australia yet remains one of the most challenging and misunderstood conditions.

We involve people impacted by dementia and their experiences in our activities and decision making, to make sure we are representative of the diverse range of dementia experiences across Australia. We amplify the voices of people impacted by dementia through advocating and sharing stories to help inform and inspire others.

Dementia Australia is the source of trusted information, education and support services. We advocate for positive change for people living with dementia, their families and carers, and support vital research. We are here to support people impacted by dementia, and to enable them to live as well as possible.