



Providing critical support for people with dementia and their carers via a post-diagnostic education program



What is the focus of the research?

Investigating the health benefits of a wide-ranging support and education program for people with dementia and their carers.

Why is it important?

People experience overwhelming grief and helplessness when they receive a dementia diagnosis. Unfortunately, many describe a lack of critical information to empower them and highlight the path to come.

Post-diagnostic care and support are vital for people living with dementia and their carers. They need access to timely education, emotional and practical support, lifestyle advice, and meaningful activities that maximise their quality of life and potentially delay cognitive decline. The specific needs of carers are often neglected, leaving them without education on the stages of dementia, practical strategies to manage stress and behavioural changes, or support for their own emotional health.

Access to support that considers the holistic needs of the person and their carer is fragmented. Roll-out is inconsistent and it often relies on funding from already-constrained non-government organisations. Dr D’Cunha will investigate and evaluate an innovative 12-week program that combines exercise, social activities, nutrition, dementia-care education, and in-home support strategies. It will be designed by Canberra Health Services and the University of Canberra, and draw from clinical experience and advice from Dementia Australia advocates.

Dr D’Cunha hopes this multi-faceted program will enable people living with dementia to maintain independence, improve their physical function and nutrition, increase quality of life

and mental health, and delay cognitive decline. Another important aspect of the program is the psychosocial focus on building capacity, resilience and mindfulness in carers. The results of this project will be used to improve post-diagnostic, person-centred care and clinical practice Australia-wide.



How will this happen?

Stage 1: develop the Sustainable Personalised Interventions for Cognition, Care, and Engagement (SPICE) program by conducting interviews and focus groups with people who have lived experience of dementia, allied health professionals and neuropsychologists.

Stage 2: interview people with dementia, carers, relevant healthcare providers, Dementia Australia staff, GPs, geriatricians and memory clinic workers. Evaluate factors that enable participation and present barriers and challenges to participation, in post-diagnostic support programs.

Stage 3: conduct the pilot SPICE program with 24 people living with dementia and 24 carers. Outcome measures administered pre- and post-program delivery will be dementia health-related quality of life, cognitive performance, physical function and behavioural symptoms of dementia.



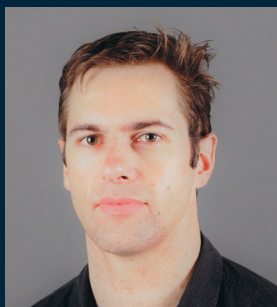
What will this mean for people with dementia and their carers?

- The opportunity to have direct input into the program's design.
- Post-diagnostic support that improves quality of life and potentially delays cognitive decline.
- Much-needed education, emotional support and tools to navigate the stages of dementia.



This program offers people with dementia and carers personalised lifestyle advice and support from a range of allied health professionals.

– Dr Nathan D’Cunha



Who’s undertaking the research?

Dr Nathan D’Cunha, University of Canberra

Dr D’Cunha is an assistant professor in human nutrition in the Faculty of Health, University of Canberra. His research focuses on promoting the wellbeing and quality of life of people with dementia and carers through participation in meaningful activities.

As a leader of the University of Canberra’s Ageing Research Group, Dr D’Cunha works on projects involving post-diagnostic support for people with dementia and their carers, intergenerational care, and small-scale dementia care for people with younger onset dementia.

In 2018 he received a Dementia Australia Research Foundation PhD scholarship and was a recipient of the RM Gibson Award from the Australian Association of Gerontology. Dr D’Cunha is the current chair of the Australian Association of Gerontology’s ACT Committee.

The title of Dr D’Cunha’s project is *Evaluation of a multicomponent post-diagnostic support program for people living with dementia and their carers*.

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