



Overhauling healthcare services so people with dementia can remain independent for longer



What is the focus of the research?

Overcoming the barriers community-based aged care services face to make reablement interventions part of standard healthcare for people living with dementia.



Why is it important?

Dementia is the second-leading cause of death in Australia and a major cause of disability. One in 10 people aged 65 or over have dementia. By 2058 it is estimated that this number will have doubled.

As disease progresses, people lose the ability to perform everyday activities; many are forced into residential care. The Royal Commission called for reablement and rehabilitation services to be a focus of aged-care services, in order to maximise peoples' independence and autonomy.

Evidence-informed reablement interventions, such as occupational therapy and exercise,



What is reablement?

A person-centered approach to community-based care services that helps people remain independent and improve overall wellbeing. It is provided by allied health professionals, such as physiotherapists, occupational therapists and exercise physiologists.

Interventions are delivered at home and aim to help people reach specific goals based around activities of daily living (e.g. gardening, preparing meals, performing self-care activities) so they can stay living at home for longer.

Care providers help people achieve their goals by building on their current strengths and abilities, rather than trying to regain what has been lost. Interventions are intensive and occur for a defined period, which is usually 6-12 weeks.

answer this call. For people impacted by dementia, greater access to these services can increase their everyday function, help them to reach personal goals and delay the need for residential care.

Community-based reablement programs for older Australians have been shown to save the healthcare sector up to \$12,500 per person over five years. If reablement programs for people with dementia contribute half that amount, millions of dollars could be saved each year.

Despite the evidence, these services aren't offered in standard dementia care settings. In this innovative project, Dr O'Connor aims to understand and overcome the barriers to successfully implementing home-based reablement interventions in the community aged-care sector.

She will use the results to develop a national strategy on how to deliver reablement interventions to people with dementia.

Dr O'Connor also plans to create a free, easily accessible online 'implementation hub' containing a range of resources to help aged-care services implement interventions.

The outcomes of this project, and future research by Dr O'Connor, could significantly improve the services people living with dementia can access, by influencing policy and funding decisions that govern Australia's healthcare interventions.



How will this happen?

Stage 1: perform a clinical audit to evaluate the current approach to reablement provided to community-dwelling clients living with dementia. Present findings to allied health practitioners and explore methods to overcome barriers and implement changes.

Stage 2: obtain consensus on specific strategies to support reablement implementation via a national survey with key stakeholders. Outcomes to inform a draft implementation strategy.

Stage 3: evaluate the draft implementation strategy and outcomes from reablement programs delivered in a real-world setting. Allied health professionals to implement programs with clients, guided by the reablement resources.

Stage 4: develop the national implementation strategy and create the 'implementation hub' to host the strategy and other resources.



What will this mean for people with dementia?

- Greater access to services that deliver at-home reablement/rehabilitation.
- The potential to maximise everyday living abilities and remain independent for longer.
- Greater capacity for community aged-care providers to deliver these services.



Who's undertaking the research?

Dr Claire O'Connor, University of New South Wales, HammondCare, Neuroscience Research Australia

Dr O'Connor is a senior research fellow in the University of New South Wales' School of Psychology, senior research fellow (honorary) with NeuRA, and honorary senior research fellow with HammondCare. She is also a registered occupational therapist.

Dr O'Connor is currently undertaking a Dementia Centre for Research Collaboration post-doctoral fellowship to understand how to bridge the implementation gap to maximise everyday functioning for people living with dementia.

Combining her clinical training in occupational therapy and research skills, she is passionate about contributing to research that is meaningful to people impacted by dementia and the health workforce that supports them.

The title of Dr O'Connor's project is *Bridging the implementation gap: maximising everyday function for people with dementia*.