South Australian Draft Disability Inclusion Plan 2025-2029

Dementia Australia submission May 2025

Dementia Australia appreciates the opportunity to provide feedback on the draft State Disability Inclusion Plan 2025-2029. Our recommendations aim to improve experiences and outcomes for the estimated 35,000 South Australians living with dementia, including 2,100 people under the age of 65 living with younger onset dementia. [1]

Dementia is the term used to describe the symptoms of a large group of neurocognitive conditions which cause progressive decline in a person's functioning.

Dementia is not just memory loss. Symptoms can also include changes in speech, reasoning, visuospatial abilities, emotional responses, social skills and physical functioning.

There are many types of dementia, including Alzheimer's disease, vascular dementia, frontotemporal dementia and Lewy body disease.

Dementia causes disability. It is not a normal part of ageing and does not only affect older people. The misconception that dementia is a condition of old age exacerbates multiple challenges experienced by younger people with a diagnosis of dementia.

Dementia and inclusion

Surveys conducted by Dementia Australia over the last decade reveal that a lack of awareness and understanding about dementia persists in the Australian community.

Following a diagnosis of dementia, people often experience stigma, loss of social engagement, and social exclusion. People living with dementia face negative stereotypes, discrimination, and a lack of understanding about their symptoms, leading to feelings of shame, fear, and exclusion.

This stigma can cause individuals to withdraw from usual social activities, avoid seeking help and become disconnected from their communities and support networks. As social isolation increases, it can contribute to feelings of loneliness, depression, and hopelessness.

[1] Dementia Australia (2025) **Dementia facts and figures.**

Dementia Friendly Communities

Dementia Australia supports actions to improve social inclusion. Communities play a critical role in encouraging inclusivity, reducing discrimination and supporting access to the services, supports, activities and spaces that all South Australians have a right to.

A dementia-friendly community is a place in which a person with dementia is supported to live a high-quality life with meaning, purpose and value. Dementia-friendly communities are vital to reduce the risk of social isolation of people living with dementia and support them to remain engaged and empowered.

The physical environment is of a dementia-friendly community is important, such as using unambiguous seating design, clear signage, and the inclusion of quiet spaces. Dementia Australia provides resources to support the development of dementia-friendly communities and environments. These resources can be accessed at **Dementia Friendly Communities.**

Dementia Australia has also developed **Dementia Language Guidelines** to promote consistent use of appropriate, inclusive and non-stigmatising language when talking to or writing about people living with dementia.

The Dementia Language Guidelines are an inclusion strategy. The words used to talk or write about dementia can have a significant impact on how people living with dementia are viewed and treated in our community. Talking about dementia in a negative manner or by using incorrect terminology or inaccurate facts can reinforce stereotypes and further exacerbate stigma and misinformation about dementia.

There are also specific issues experienced by people living with younger onset dementia, which is dementia diagnosed before the age of 65. People living with younger onset dementia are often in full-time employment and actively raising and financially supporting a family when diagnosed. Loss of income, self-esteem and perceived future purpose can pose multiple psychological challenges.

Often people with younger onset dementia must retire prematurely, which can have significant financial consequences, especially if they are the primary earners for their families. They may still be responsible for paying off mortgages, supporting children, and maintaining other obligations. State government-level strategies to support employment and inclusion are vital for the estimated 2,100 South Australians living with younger onset dementia.

Recommendations

Dementia Australia recommends that the Disability Inclusion Plan include benchmarks or goals for each Outcome Measure. The current proposed Outcome Measures do not define acceptable levels of performance, meaning that the Measures cannot effectively drive improvement.

We also recommend that when Outcomes are assessed, representation of all disabilities is ensured, including people living with dementia and other neurodegenerative disabilities.

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Dementia Australia also makes the following recommendations for Outcome Measures, which support practical improvement to inclusion outcomes for people living with dementia in South Australia:

Domain	Priority Area	Recommendation for Outcome Measure
Access	Universal Design	Include an Outcome Measure to demonstrate the proportion of public-facing government buildings, parks and recreation areas, public transport infrastructure, and improvements to footpaths, road crossings and car parks which are built or redeveloped with consideration to creating dementia-friendly environments.
Opportunity	Access to Employment Opportunities	Include an Outcome Measure to demonstrate the proportion of State authorities implementing best-practice support for people living with younger onset dementia and other neurodegenerative disabilities to remain in employment.
	Supportive Environments	Include an Outcome Measure to demonstrate the proportion of State authorities which have implemented the Dementia Friendly Language Guidelines across the agency.[2]
Support	Family and Carer support	Ensure that Outcome Measure 4.1 includes all South Australian carers for a person living with disability, including those who seek or access respite in the aged care system.
Wellbeing	Targeted Knowledge, Understanding and Support	Include Outcome Measures of the proportion of health services which have implemented dementia-friendly design principles,[3] and the proportion of health workers who have received dementia training.[4]
	Supports and Interventions	Include an Outcome Measure of the total number of patients accessing supportive referral and transition services between Local Health Networks and aged care providers.
Justice	Responding to Emergencies	Include an Outcome Measure of the proportion of First Responders employed by State Authorities who have received training in meeting the needs of people living with dementia.

Thank you for the opportunity to comment on the draft State Disability Inclusion Plan 2025-2029. Dementia Australia would be happy to continue discussions about inclusion matters for South Australians living with dementia. The Dementia Australia Policy and Advocacy team has dedicated staff in South Australia and can be contacted on **policyteam@dementia.org.au**.

[2] Dementia Australia. 2021. **Dementia Language Guidelines.**
[3] See for example, Dementia Australia. 2025. **Dementia Friendly Communities** and Department of Health and Aged Care. 2024. **National Aged Care Design Principles and Guidelines.**
[4] For example, Dementia Australia. 2025. **Dementia Essentials.**

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