RACGP Royal Australian College of General Practitioners

Dementia Australia®

# It's time to talk about dementia with GPs

## Brain health, diagnosis and ongoing care

## It's time to talk about dementia in Australia

- Dementia is the leading cause of death for Australians.
- The AIHW estimates that there are 446,500 Australians living with dementia in 2026 including 29,000 people aged 18-65 living with young onset dementia and 1,500 children.
- An estimated 1.7 million people in Australia are involved in the care of someone living with dementia.
- 2 in 3 people with dementia are thought to be living in the community[1].

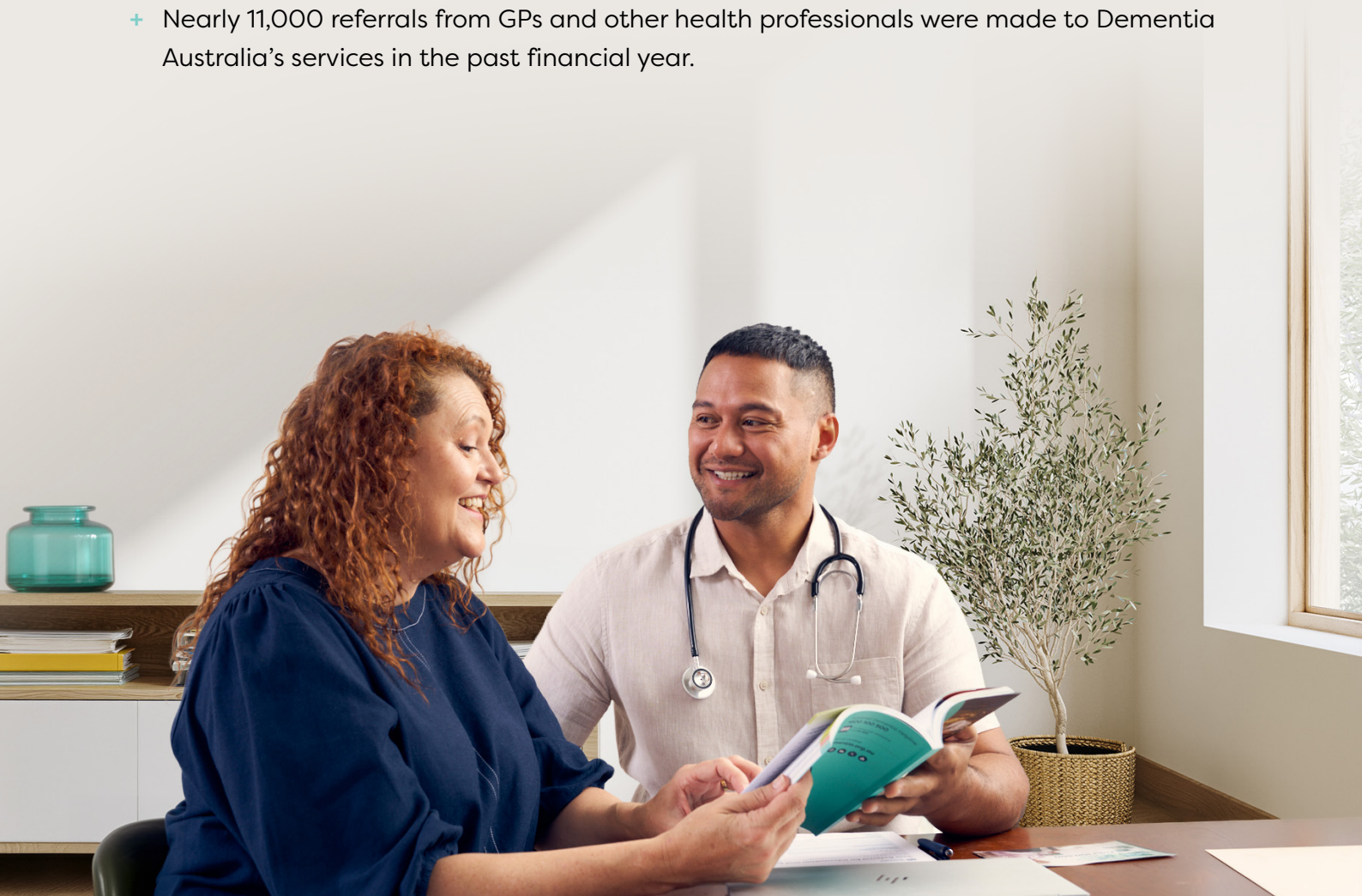
## It's time to talk about how primary care and the role of GPs is changing

- More people are living with dementia than ever before, and the number of Australians living with dementia is expected to increase to more than 1 million by 2065.
- New tests to diagnose dementia and treatments are becoming more widely available and increasing the role of GPs in dementia diagnosis and management.
- Stronger evidence and new WHO guidelines highlight that 45% of cases of dementia can potentially be delayed or prevented by addressing 14 modifiable risk factors at different stages during the life course[2,3].

# It’s time to talk about the critical role primary care, especially GPs, play in dementia care

**General practitioners play a critical role in identifying risk, diagnosis, referrals, supporting early intervention and coordinating care over time.**

- GPs are often the first point of contact for people noticing changes in thinking, memory or behaviour.
- People living with dementia in the community see a GP 16 times and people living with dementia in residential care see a GP 25 times each year[4].
- Approximately one-third (31.2%) of GPs indicated that they do not routinely discuss brain health with their patients. Only 2% of GPs reported routinely discussing brain health with patients of all age groups[5].
- In Australia, it takes 1.9 years on average between a person experiencing symptoms and raising them with a health professional[6].
- Most GPs (78%) are confident in identifying symptoms that warrant further investigation for dementia.
- However, only half (54%) feel confident in their knowledge about dementia diagnosis and management[5].
- The average timeframe from initial onset of symptoms to dementia diagnosis is around 3 years, but this can be much longer for some types of dementia and young onset dementia[1].
- Nearly 11,000 referrals from GPs and other health professionals were made to Dementia Australia’s services in the past financial year.



# It's time to talk about strengthening primary care to promote brain health

GPs are uniquely placed to support patients with dementia risk reduction, timely diagnosis and ongoing care. To support GPs in this critical work, Dementia Australia and the Royal Australian College of General Practitioners advocate for:

**Ensuring accessible and affordable longer GP consultations for people living with or at risk of developing dementia by increasing Medicare rebates for Level C and Level D GP consultations.**

Dementia is a complex condition that commonly occurs with multiple other chronic conditions. It takes time to deliver high-quality dementia care. Increasing rebates will give Australians access to more affordable longer GP consultations to ensure they receive tailored care to reduce dementia risk and comprehensive and coordinated care tailored to support them to live as well as possible with dementia.

**Resources and tools to support GPs to embed brain health and dementia risk assessment and reduction activity across expanded health assessments.**

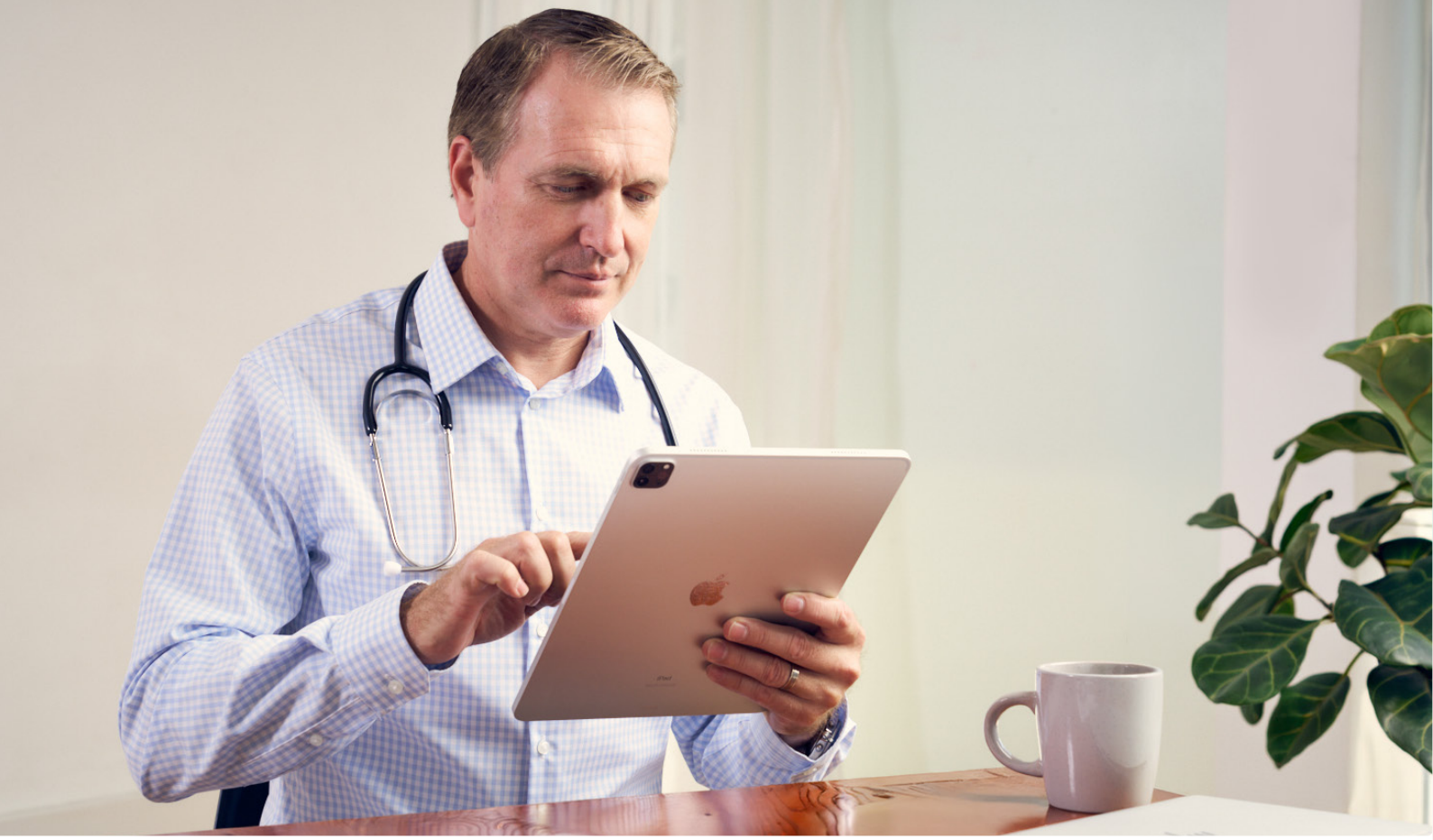
We need to make it easier for GPs to include brain health and dementia risk assessment and reduction through the expansion of MBS health assessment items, support for longer consultations and by developing practical tools and resources. The 45–49-year-old health check offers one existing opportunity to identify and reduce risk factors at a critical life stage. Expanding eligibility for these preventative health checks across other age groups could help maximise brain health. It will help give GPs the time and confidence to use tools to consistently assess and address dementia risk and help reduce the impact of dementia into the future.

**Increasing the uptake and quality of chronic disease management planning for people living with or at risk of developing dementia via tools for GPs.**

Chronic disease management plans offer an opportunity for both dementia risk reduction and coordinated dementia care. Developing dementia specific chronic diseases management plans and tools will enable GPs to better tailor risk reduction strategies, diagnose dementia earlier, and support people living with dementia to live well for longer.

**Investing in a national brain health campaign to improve public understanding of dementia risk reduction.**

In the context of the evolving research on modifiable dementia risk factors and clinical focus on earlier diagnosis, there is a greater need for clear and consistent community understanding about brain health and dementia risk reduction and associated resources to enable GPs to support their patients.



# It’s time to talk about dementia support

To refer a patient to Dementia Australia use this QR code:

You will find:

- Referral form to Dementia Australia services
- National Dementia Helpline
- The Dementia Guide
- Younger Onset Guide
- BrainTrack
- Hold the Moment podcast
- CogDrisk


1. Dementia Australia. *Facts and Figures.* 2026; Available from: **dementia.org.au/about-dementia/dementia-facts-and-figures**.
2. Livingston, G., et al., *Dementia prevention, intervention, and care: 2024 report of the Lancet Standing Commission.* The Lancet, 2024. 404(10452): p. 572-628.
3. World Health Organization, *Risk reduction of cognitive decline and dementia: WHO guidelines.* Second edition. 2026, Geneva: World Health Organization.
4. Australian Institute of Health and Welfare. *Dementia in Australia: Primary health care services.* 2026 [cited 2026 18 August 2026]; Available from: **aihw.gov.au/reports/dementia/dementia-in-aus/contents/health-services/primary-health-care-services**.
5. Alemayehu, M., Lomas, J., Macpherson, H., Orellana, L., Botha, T., Hutchinson, A., *General Practitioners’ perspectives on BrainTrack to promote awareness of brain health* 2026, Dementia Australia.
6. Black, C.M., et al., *Quantifying the diagnostic pathway for patients with cognitive impairment: real-world data from Australia.* International Psychogeriatrics, 2020. 32(5): p. 601-610.