

## Media Release

# FIFTY PERCENT OF DEMENTIA CASES GO UNDIAGNOSED

A major report by Alzheimer's Disease International (ADI) prepared by the Institute of Psychiatry, Kings College London has found that in high income countries only 20-50% of people living with dementia are recognised and documented in primary care.

The authors say that this greatly limits access to valuable information, treatment, care and support.

The report concludes that every country should have a national dementia strategy that promotes early diagnosis and intervention.

Glenn Rees, CEO Alzheimer's Australia, said that the findings in the ADI report are consistent with a new paper released by Alzheimer's Australia for Dementia Awareness Week today titled "*Timely diagnosis of dementia: Can we do better?*".

"This paper, prepared by a team at the University of Newcastle has found that there is an average of 1.2 years before a diagnosis is made from the first consultation. This was consistent with longstanding concerns of consumers about delays in diagnosis," Mr Rees said.

"There were many reasons for the delays in diagnosis including the false belief that dementia is a normal part of ageing, denial on the part of the individual and family, the complexity of diagnosing dementia and doctors being reluctant to damage the doctor-patient relationship."

The Alzheimer's Australia paper identifies strategies to overcoming the barriers to diagnosis including; greater public awareness and understanding of dementia; training and education to better support GPs at the service level; and system changes involving the more effective use of practice nurses to assist with the screening of those concerned about their memories.

"A key issue is the failure of health policy to regard dementia as a chronic disease," Mr Rees said.

"Any issue to do with dementia is regarded as one for aged care with the consequence that many important health issues including timely diagnosis, acute care, dementia risk reduction and investment in research are simply swept under the carpet."

Professor David Ames, Chief Medical Advisor, Alzheimer's Australia, said it is important that those who are worried about their memory go and see their doctor.

"Memory loss may not be caused by dementia, but, if it is, getting a diagnosis as early as possible is important in helping to get the right information, treatment and support."

This year Dementia Awareness Week centres around these messages with the theme "*Worried About Your Memory? Call the National Dementia Helpline 1800 100 500*".

For more information on Dementia Awareness Week visit [www.alzheimers.org.au](http://www.alzheimers.org.au).

*Dementia Awareness Week is an Australian Government Initiative.*

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### Media enquiries:

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## Key facts and statistics

- An estimated 269,000<sup>1</sup> Australians currently live with dementia
- Without a major medical breakthrough, that is expected to soar to about 981,000 by 2050<sup>1</sup>
- Each week, there are 1,500 new cases of dementia in Australia. That is expected to grow to 7,400 new cases each week by 2050<sup>2</sup>
- There are approximately 16,000<sup>1</sup> people in Australia with Younger Onset Dementia (a diagnosis of dementia under the age of 65)
- Dementia is the third leading cause of death in Australia, after heart disease and stroke<sup>3</sup>
- One in four people over the age of 85 have dementia
- An estimated 1.2 million Australians are caring for someone with dementia<sup>4</sup>
- Dementia is fatal and, as yet, there is no cure
- Dementia has an impact on every part of the health and care system
- The total estimated worldwide costs of dementia were US\$604 billion in 2010<sup>5</sup>
- These costs account for about 1% of the world's gross domestic product
- If dementia were a country, it would be the world's 18<sup>th</sup> largest economy<sup>5</sup>
- If it were a company, it would be the world's largest, exceeding Wal-Mart (US\$414 billion) and Exxon Mobil (US\$311 billion)<sup>5</sup>
- Australia faces a shortage of more than 150,000 paid and unpaid carers for people with dementia by 2029<sup>6</sup>
- The cost of replacing all family carers with paid carers is estimated at \$5.5 billion per annum<sup>6</sup>
- Dementia will become the third greatest source of health and residential aged care spending within two decades. These costs alone will be around 1% of GDP<sup>2</sup>
- By the 2060s, spending on dementia is set to outstrip that of any other health condition. It is projected to be \$83 billion (in 2006-07 dollars), and will represent around 11% of the entire health and residential aged care sector spending<sup>2</sup>
- Dementia is already the single greatest cause of disability in older Australians (aged 65 years or older)<sup>2</sup>
- More than 50% of residents in Australian Government-subsidised aged care facilities have dementia<sup>7</sup> (104,400 out of 198,500 permanent residents in 2008-09)

### What is dementia?

Dementia is the term used to describe the symptoms of a large group of illnesses which cause a progressive decline in a person's functioning. It is a broad term used to describe a loss of memory, intellect, rationality, social skills and physical functioning. Alzheimer's disease is the most common form of dementia, accounting for between 50 – 70% of all dementia cases.

Dementia can happen to anybody, but it is more common after the age of 65. However, people in their 40s and 50s can also have dementia.

***Alzheimer's Australia** is the charity for people with dementia and their families and carers. As the peak body, it provides advocacy, support services, education and information.*

### National Dementia Helpline: 1800 100 500

(The National Dementia Helpline is an Australian Government Initiative)

### Dementia is a National Health Priority

[www.alzheimers.org.au](http://www.alzheimers.org.au)

<sup>1</sup> Caring Places: Planning for Aged Care and Dementia 2010 – 2050, Access Economics, July 2010

<sup>2</sup> Keeping Dementia Front of Mind: Incidence and prevalence 2009 – 2050, Access Economics, August 2009

<sup>3</sup> Causes of Death, Australia, 2009, Australian Bureau of Statistics, May 2011

<sup>4</sup> Pfizer Health Report Issue #45 – Dementia, March 2011

<sup>5</sup> World Alzheimer Report 2010, The Global Economic Impact of Dementia, Alzheimer's Disease International, 21 September 2010

<sup>6</sup> Making Choices, Future Dementia Care: Projections, Problems and Preferences, Access Economics, May 2009

<sup>7</sup> Dementia among aged care residents: first information from the Aged Care Funding Instrument, Australian Institute of Health and Welfare, May 2011