

Media Release

Only 1 in 3 over 65 with dementia will be correctly diagnosed

As our population ages, and more of us survive the diseases of mid-life, it is likely that more of us will experience dementia. The Framingham Study has found that for those of us who reach 65 without having developed dementia, the risk we have of developing dementia in our remaining lifespan is around 20% for women and 17% for men¹.

So one out of every five of us who have reached late middle age can expect to develop dementia, yet only one in three of us who get dementia can expect to be correctly diagnosed. Without timely diagnosis, what chance do we have to access appropriate interventions and treatment?

These words came today from Alzheimer's Australia National President, Professor Graeme Samuel speaking at the **Austin Health Cognitive Dementia and Memory Service Annual Conference: "Early Diagnosis: Effect on Care & Outcomes"**

Professor Samuel emphasised some important factors of early diagnosis:

- To ensure the opportunity to put an advance care plan in place for future medical treatment
- To appoint a power of attorney
- To ensure access to the latest, evidence-based interventions and treatments
- To set up good care and support in the community, to remain living at home for as long as possible
- To ensure future carers have access to education, support, and respite care to help them in their carer journey.

There are clear benefits to timely diagnosis yet the evidence shows that for those who are even diagnosed at all, the average time between first symptoms and diagnosis is just over 3 years.²

"As a consequence, many people with dementia and their families in Australia slip through the gaps and miss out on crucial opportunities for early intervention and the opportunity to fully understand their own condition. This is a tragedy, and what's more it is largely avoidable." Professor Samuel said.

Alzheimer's Australia believes that to begin to address this problem, we need targeted information and education on dementia, its warning signs, and its assessment both for health professionals and for the general community to encourage timely diagnosis. We have some foundations to build on, with the experience of the Alzheimer's Australia [Detect Early](#) program and other initiatives.

"Dementia is one of the major chronic diseases of this century. Our nation needs a holistic plan to tackle dementia over the next decade and more, with a focus on timely diagnosis, as a fundamental element in improving quality of care, and supporting people to live well in the community for longer." Professor Samuel concluded.

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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. More than 342,800 people have dementia in Australia. This number is projected to reach more than half a million by 2030.

National Dementia Helpline: 1800 100 500

fightdementia.org.au

An interpreter service is available

(The National Dementia Helpline is an Australian Government Initiative)

¹ Sehadri S, Belser A, Kelly-Hayes M, Kase CS, Au R, Kannel WB et al, The lifetime risk of stroke: Estimates from the Framingham Study. *Stroke*, 2006; 37 (2):345-50; cited in Alzheimer's Association (USA) 2013 *Alzheimer's Disease Facts and Figures* p 19.

www.alz.org/downloads/facts_figures_2013.pdf

² Speechly,C. (2008). The pathway to dementia diagnosis. *Medical Journal of Australia*, 189, 487-9