NEW REPORT HIGHLIGHTS THE GROWING NUMBERS OF ABORIGINAL AND TORRES STRAIT ISLANDER PEOPLE AFFECTED BY DEMENTIA

The number of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people affected by dementia are growing, a new report reveals. The publication, Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander People and Dementia: A review of the research, released by Alzheimer’s Australia highlights the devastating impact dementia is having in Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities.

A number of studies have been conducted around the country into dementia prevalence with the results from research indicating that dementia is affecting Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people at a rate 3 to 5 times higher than the general Australian population rate.

Researchers are exploring the reasons behind the higher rate of dementia in communities but the greater frequency of modifiable risk factors such as smoking, low fruit and vegetable intake, high body mass index and physical inactivity in Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities could be playing a role in the elevated rate of dementia.

“Action is needed to ensure that Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people living with dementia and their family members are receiving culturally-appropriate services and supports now and into the future,” Graeme Samuel AC, National President of Alzheimer’s Australia said.

“Incorporating dementia into pre-existing health strategies as well as widely disseminating Alzheimer’s Australia’s Your Story Matters resources will help raise awareness of the modifiable risk factors of dementia and assist in the timely diagnosis of the condition.

“Training packages targeting dementia awareness, including the use of culturally-appropriate cognitive screening tools, should be promoted to mainstream health professionals and Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander health workers to support access to timely diagnosis.”

continued page 2
The report makes a number of key recommendations to ensure that Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people are receiving culturally appropriate services and supports including:

- Incorporating dementia into pre-existing preventative health strategies and programs aimed at lowering the risks associated with diabetes and cardiovascular disease.
- The broad dissemination of the Your Story Matters resources to Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander health workers and communities to target the modifiable risk factors associated with dementia.
- Improved access to support services for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people with dementia and their carers particularly for those residing in remote areas.
- Awareness and education programs should be delivered to Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities to raise the profile of dementia including through the increased funding of Alzheimer’s Australia education and training programs.
- Training packages targeting dementia awareness and the use of the Kimberley Indigenous Cognitive Assessment be promoted to mainstream health professionals and Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander health workers through Aboriginal Community Controlled Health Organisations to support access to timely diagnosis.

Fred Tanner, Chair of Alzheimer’s Australia’s National Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Advisory Group, said that these simple solutions could help to reduce a looming epidemic affecting Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Australians.

“The number of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people aged 55 years and over is projected to increase over the next twenty years which means if we don’t act now, we will see an increase in the number of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people diagnosed with dementia,” Mr Tanner said.

Copies of the report can be obtained from the Alzheimer’s Australia website (click here) or please contact Kristen Holdsworth on 03 9816 5715 or kristen.holdsworth@alzheimers.org.au
After a nation-wide executive search and recruitment process, Ms Carol Bennett has accepted the position of Chief Executive Officer of Alzheimer’s Australia.

She will commence her new role before Christmas 2014.

Graeme Samuel AC, Chair of Alzheimer’s Australia said, “We are delighted to be able to attract a CEO of Ms Bennett’s calibre into this important role. Ms Bennett has been a leader in the Australian national health policy area for a number of years. During this time, Carol has been CEO of some of Australia’s leading health organisations including the Consumers Health Forum of Australia, the Australian Rural and Remote Workforce Agencies Group (now Rural Health Workforce Australia) and the Victorian Alcohol and Drug Association. She has also been a consultant to a number of influential health organisations including beyondblue”.

Carol is committed to community and consumer engagement as reflected in her appointments to the International Alliance of Patient Organisations and the National Health and Medical Research Council representing community interests.

‘Carol has a reputation for achieving real outcomes in the organisations she has managed and her capacity to work collaboratively with many key stakeholders will be an asset to Alzheimer’s Australia as it continues to forge new opportunities to improve the experiences of Australians living with dementia,’ Mr Samuel said.

Ms Bennett said, ‘Alzheimer’s is an important issue for all Australians. We all know someone who has been touched by this disease, and its prevalence is increasing significantly. I am honoured to have this opportunity to build on the great work Alzheimer’s Australia has been doing for the past 15 years under Glenn Rees’ excellent leadership. If we do our job well, we can improve the lives of millions of Australians. I welcome that challenge.’

Graeme Samuel also paid tribute to the work of outgoing CEO Glenn Rees. ‘Over the last 15 years of Glenn Rees leadership, Alzheimer’s Australia has established itself as a leading consumer advocacy organisation. Glenn helped deliver: the Dementia Initiative in 2005; the commitments in the 2012 aged care reforms to quality dementia care; timely diagnosis of dementia; better dementia care in hospitals and dementia risk reduction; and an additional $200 million for dementia research in the 2014 Federal Budget. Alzheimer’s Australia is now better positioned through the commitment of its state and territory organisations to provide valued care and support to people living with dementia through the significant funding provided from the Commonwealth.

Alzheimer’s Australia wishes Glenn every success in his role as Chair of Alzheimer’s Disease International and in his further work as a consumer advocate.”
Alzheimer’s Australia has confirmed its support for the Coalition Statement on the recognition of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples in the Australian Constitution.

The goal of the Health Coalition project is to contribute to the national conversation about constitutional recognition of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples, with a clear public statement of support from a health perspective by leading non-government health organisations.

The Project is an initiative of the Lowitja Institute, Australia’s national research institute wholly dedicated to Aboriginal health research and has been endorsed by the National Health Leadership Forum (constituted under the auspices of the National Congress of Australia’s First Peoples) and the Close the Gap Coalition.

The story of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Australia is a shared national story that needs to be acknowledged in the Constitution to improve understanding and relationships with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people for better health outcomes. All Australians need to understand this national story to bring the country together. ‘It is the next step in reconciling our past and it’s the right thing to do.’

Following the report of the Expert Panel on Constitutional Recognition, all major political parties declared their support for constitutional recognition, and the Prime Minister has announced that the government intends to work towards a referendum. For the referendum to pass, the people of Australia need to understand and support the case for change, and there needs to be strong leadership from across the political spectrum including from Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander leaders.

The health system, through its many respected non-government organisations, has the opportunity to make a contribution to the national debate, by speaking up for the value of recognition from a health perspective.

The Project has begun to develop a coalition of non-government organisations, across the Australian health system, with each agreeing to sign a short statement in support of constitutional change. The statement and its signatories will be publicised through traditional and social media, and other community activities. The Lowitja Institute is providing an organising base for this work (through a contract with Flinders University). The project is collaborating with Recognise, the national community-based organisation supporting constitutional change, under the auspices of Reconciliation Australia.

An initial group of 19 leading national health organisations have founded the coalition, and the total membership is now over 85. Further updates regarding the Health Coalition Project will be available over the coming months.

The 2014 Overcoming Indigenous Disadvantage (OID) report was released on Wednesday, 19 November and revealed some positive trends in the wellbeing of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people with improvements in health, education and economic outcomes3.

More specifically, the report shows that, nationally, for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Australians:

- economic outcomes have improved over the longer term, with higher incomes, lower reliance on income support, increased home ownership, and higher rates of full time and professional employment. However, improvements have slowed in recent years
- several health outcomes have improved, including increased life expectancy and lower child mortality. However, rates of disability and chronic disease remain high, mental health outcomes have not improved, and hospitalisation rates for self-harm have increased
- post-secondary education outcomes have improved, but there has been virtually no change in literacy and numeracy results at school, which are particularly poor in remote areas
- improvements have occurred over the longer term, with higher incomes, lower reliance on income support, increased home ownership, and higher rates of full time and professional employment. However, improvements have slowed in recent years
- the proportion of adults reporting high/very high levels of psychological distress increased from 27 per cent in 2004-05 to 30 per cent in 2012-13, and hospitalisations for intentional self-harm increased by 48 per cent over this period.
- the adult imprisonment rate increased 57 per cent between 2000 and 2013. Juvenile detention rates increased sharply between 2000-01 and 2007-08, and fluctuated since at around 24 times the rate for non-Indigenous youth.

To view the report click here

OVERCOMING INDIGENOUS DISADVANTAGE REPORT RELEASED


NATSIDAG MEMBER BIO

PAUL CALCOTT – NATSIDAG MEMBER

Paul is a Wiradjuri man on his father’s side from the Bathurst and Dubbo areas of NSW, his mother is Irish from Guyra NSW. Like many of his people since colonisation, his father’s family moved to suburban Sydney seeking accommodation and work in the early 1950s. Paul contracted polio at around 18 months of age and his earliest memories are of living in a corrugated iron shack on the banks of the Lane Cove River.

Paul has worked in the area of Disabilities and Community Services for almost 30 years and currently holds the position of First Peoples Business Unit Manager with Suncare Community Services based on the Sunshine Coast in Queensland, a respite and support service for families living with disability, mental illness, frail aged and chronic health conditions.

Paul is a board member of the First Peoples Disability Network Australia, a peak advisory body and voice for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples living with disability, and Arts Access Australia, a national organisation supporting people with disability.

In 2010, Paul started the Suncare Nandjimadji artist group and annual art exhibitions for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples with disability and their carers, sponsored by Suncare and Novotel Hotels.

Paul feels that to provide people with the opportunity to connect with culture via art plays a huge part in the healing process and strengthens resilience in individuals, family and community.
UPCOMING CONFERENCES AND EVENTS

6th Annual National Dementia Conference
When: 19-20 February 2015
Location: Melbourne, Victoria
Further information: click here

Indigenous Policy in Action
When: 11-13 March 2015
Location: Perth, Western Australia
Further information: click here

30th International Conference of Alzheimer’s Disease International
When: 15-18 April 2015
Location: Perth, Western Australia
Further information: click here

Creating Futures Conference
When: 11-14 May 2015
Location: Cairns, Queensland
Further information: click here

Aboriginal Maternal and Child Health Conference
When: 13-14 May 2015
Location: Perth, Western Australia
Further information: click here

Suicide and Self-Harm Prevention Conference
When: 24-26 June 23015
Location: Cairns, Queensland
Further information: click here
A series of help sheets about various dementia topics have been developed to inform Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people about dementia. These include:

- Memory Changes
- What is dementia?
- Diagnosing dementia
- Alzheimer’s disease
- Information for family and friends

To view the help sheets, click here

For the latest information about upcoming conferences, workshops and events look under the Dementia section on the Australian Indigenous HealthInfoNet

CONTACT NUMBERS

National Dementia Helpline
1800 100 500

Alzheimer’s Australia
1800 100 500 OR
WWW.FIGHTDEMENTIA.ORG.AU

Dementia Behaviour Management Advisory Service (DBMAS)
1800 699 799