

Media Release

Wednesday 18 October 2017

Dementia awareness alarmingly low, new survey finds

More than 80 per cent of Australians do not know that dementia is the second leading cause of death in this country, according to a new survey. This is despite the fact that one-third of respondents reported someone close to them had a diagnosis of the condition.

The survey, conducted by Ipsos Australia found that although there is some understanding of dementia in the general community, it is alarmingly low.

More than half the survey respondents did not understand the relationship between Alzheimer's disease and dementia; almost 40 per cent of respondents did not know that dementia is not a normal part of ageing, and 39 per cent of people agreed they felt awkward around someone with dementia. As well, 41 per cent of respondents said they found talking to someone with dementia confronting.

The results of the survey have been released to coincide with the launch of Dementia Australia, the new voice of Alzheimer's Australia

It is estimated that more than 413,000 Australians live with dementia, which, without a significant medical breakthrough, is expected to increase to 1.1 million people by 2056¹. It is the second leading cause of death of Australians, and is now the leading cause of death of women in Australia². There are more than 100 types of dementia, with Alzheimer's disease being the most common form.

Dementia Australia Chair Graeme Samuel AC said the shockingly low awareness and understanding of dementia in the community was extremely disappointing, particularly given the significant and rapidly growing health issue that dementia is becoming in Australia, and how many people it already impacts.

"This is, quite simply not good enough," Mr Samuel said.

"Dementia is a national health priority area, is the second leading cause of death of Australians – and the leading cause of death among Australian women – and prevalence is increasing at a rapid rate. Yet so few people understand just what dementia is and how it impacts people with a diagnosis and the research shows that people even find talking to someone with dementia confronting. These results are very concerning.

"As a community, we need to change and we need to change now. That is one of the reasons why federated Alzheimer's Australia organisations in NSW, Victoria, Queensland, the Northern Territory, South Australia, the ACT and Tasmania have now joined together as one, unified organisation and will, from today, be known as Dementia Australia.

"Dementia Australia draws upon a strong and proud history of federated organisations who have always worked together to provide much-needed advocacy, support services, education and information for people living with dementia, their families and their carers. But, from today, these organisations will truly stand united as one, better positioned to able to continue to do what they do now, and into the future."

Dementia Australia CEO Maree McCabe said it was an historic move and one that would lead to better outcomes for people with dementia.

¹ The National Centre for Social and Economic Modelling NATSEM (2016) *Economic Cost of Dementia in Australia 2016-2056*

² Australian Bureau of Statistics (2017) *Causes of Death, Australia, 2016* (cat. No. 3303.0)



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“Having all these organisations and people who have been so dedicated come together, unified as one, will help us to have a bigger impact, be a stronger voice, provide better support services, have a greater reach and, ultimately, better serve the people we are here for, people living with dementia, their families and carers.

“Changing our name to Dementia Australia also better represents the people we serve. We are the trusted partner of people with all forms of dementia.

“Dementia is everybody’s business and we look forward to continuing to work in partnership with government, stakeholders and the community, as a single, unified voice, to elevate the issue of dementia to the position it deserves as one of the biggest – and growing - health issues facing Australia today.”

Trevor Crosby who has Lewy body disease, is a committed advocate for the dementia cause, and says the new direction of the organisation is welcome and long overdue.

“Today’s announcement will deliver new life into the dementia battle, which already impacts so many Australians, including me,” Mr Crosby said.

“There is no time to waste in the search for a cure, for a way to prevent dementia and to ensure a better quality of life for everyone living with this condition. The name change also has great significance to me, and many other people who have different types of dementia. It makes clear the organisation is here for everyone who has a diagnosis of every form of dementia, not just people with a diagnosis of Alzheimer’s disease.

“This stronger, unified organisation which has made clear, via its new name, just who it stands for and what it does, will mean better outcomes for people with dementia.”

The Ipsos Australia Omnibus Online survey of 1,049 members of the general public was conducted in September 2017. The findings of the survey are contained in the report Awareness and Understanding of Dementia in Australia, prepared by Dementia Australia. A full copy of the report is available upon request.

Dementia Australia is the national peak body for people, of all ages, living with all forms of dementia, their families and carers. It provides advocacy, support services, education and information. An estimated 413,000 people have dementia in Australia. This number is projected to reach more than 1.1 million by 2056.

Dementia Australia is the new voice of Alzheimer’s Australia.

National Dementia Helpline: 1800 100 500

An interpreter service is available

(The National Dementia Helpline is an Australian Government Initiative)

Dementia is a National Health Priority Area

www.dementia.org.au

-Ends-

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EDITORS PLEASE NOTE – Dementia Australia will be officially launched at 10.30am today Wednesday 18 October 2017 at the Dementia Australia Biennial National Dementia Conference, Be the Change, at the Melbourne Convention and Exhibition Centre, 1 Convention Centre Place, South Wharf.

Media is invited to attend.