



Dementia Australia

What is Dementia?

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Dementia is a broad term which is used to describe a group of symptoms that cause progressive damage to the brain. Dementia is not a specific disease but rather refers to the long term and often gradual decrease in a person's ability to think, remember, and function in regular daily activities. Changes to personality, mood and difficulty using and/or understanding language may also occur.

Dementia symptoms can be classified into (1) irreversible causes and (2) reversible causes.

Irreversible causes of dementia include a number of diseases/conditions which affect the brain and lead to progressive and permanent damage to brain cells. Alzheimer's disease is the most common form of irreversible dementia, accounting for between 50 to 70% of all dementia cases. Vascular dementia is the second most common form of dementia, and is commonly caused by stroke and vascular disease. Other conditions include Frontotemporal dementia, Lewy Body Disease, Huntington's Disease, Parkinson's Disease and many others.

Reversible causes of dementia are conditions that mimic dementia, in that they produce the same set of symptoms but do not cause progressive or permanent brain damage. These are conditions which are usually treatable and/or preventable, such as delirium, depression, drug side effects, thyroid conditions and B12 deficiency.

Dementia Statistics

- Dementia is the 2nd leading cause of death in Australia – 5.4% of all deaths in males and 10.6% of all deaths in females each year (NATSEM, 2016).
- In Australia, there are over 413,106 people with dementia, 183,868 (45%) males and 228,238 (55%) females (NATSEM, 2016).
- Dementia is more common in people over the age of 65 years. However, in 2017, there are approximately 25,938 people with younger onset dementia i.e. dementia occurred before 65 years of age.
- In Australia, 1 in 10 people over the age of 65 have a diagnosis of dementia (AIHW, 2015).



- In Australia, 3 in 10 people over the age of 85 have a diagnosis of dementia (AIHW, 2015).

