

## Media Release

### DEMENTIA – THE MAJOR DISEASE OF THIS CENTURY

- **New report predicts over 1.1 million Australians with dementia by 2050**
- **By 2020 there will be 75,000 baby boomers with dementia**
- **Dementia is on track to become the largest source of health and aged care spending.**

A new report has found that the number of Australians with dementia is expected to quadruple to more than 1.1 million people by 2050, according to Glenn Rees, Chief Executive Officer of Alzheimer's Australia.

“Without a significant medical breakthrough, the number of Australians with dementia is expected to increase from 245,000 in 2009 to 591,000 in 2030 and again to a staggering 1,130,000 by 2050,” Mr Rees said.

“Every week there are more than 1,300 new cases of dementia. By 2030 there will be more than 3,600 and by 2050, about 7,400 new cases each week. The dementia epidemic is here. Dementia is a fatal disease and as yet there is no cure.”

The figures are contained in a report commissioned by Alzheimer's Australia from Access Economics – ***Keeping Dementia Front of Mind: Incidence and Prevalence 2009 – 2050.***

These figures are a dramatic increase from previous projections released in 2005. This rise is due to increases in the projections in the ageing population by the Australian Bureau of Statistics and increases reported by epidemiologists in the expected number of people with dementia in older age groups.

In the report, Access Economics has warned that future growth in the number of people with dementia will have substantial consequences for the already pressured Australian health care system and the quality of life of Australians.

Report author Lynne Pezzullo, Access Economics Director and health analyst, said “there was little recognition in the final report from the National Health and Hospital Reform Commission (NHHRC) of the challenge that the dementia epidemic represents to health and care services.

“The Australian Government should keep dementia front of mind in considering its response to the NHHRC report,” Ms Pezzullo said.

“Within our lifetime, neurodegenerative diseases, and in particular dementia, will overtake disorders such as cardiovascular disease and cancer as the major threats to Australian health and quality of life.

“The cost of community and residential care for dementia is already \$5.4 billion. Dementia will become the third greatest source of health and residential aged care

spending within two decades, costing 1% of GDP based on Australian Institute of Health and Welfare calculations.

“If current trends continue through to 2060 spending on dementia will outstrip that of any other health condition, reaching \$83 billion (in 2006-07 dollars) and representing around 11% of all health and aged care expenditure.

“Managing the challenges presented by dementia will be the overwhelming priority of health care in the 21<sup>st</sup> century and early decisions on the future financial provisioning of health and aged care are critical,” Ms Pezzullo said.

Glenn Rees, CEO, Alzheimer’s Australia, said that “The baby boomer bulge in the Australian population also means that the coming decade will see an acceleration of the impacts of ageing on dementia prevalence greater than seen in Australian history.

“The first baby boomers turn 65 in 2010 and there will be 75,000 baby boomers with dementia by 2020,” Mr Rees said.

“The report provides projections that highlight the importance of planning service delivery to ensure equitable access to dementia care for those in regional Australia, people from Culturally and Linguistically Diverse (CALD) communities and those with younger onset dementia.

“The number of people from CALD backgrounds with dementia will more than triple by 2050 to 120,000. This represents a significant increase in the future demand for CALD trained dementia care providers and culturally appropriate services,” Mr Rees said.

“It is projected that the number of regional Australians with dementia will increase by over 350% between 2009 and 2050, to 449,000 – nearly double the total number of Australians with dementia today.

“There are currently 15,000 Australians under 65 years of age with younger onset dementia for whom there are few appropriate services,” Mr Rees said.

Professor Peter Schofield, CEO of the Prince of Wales Medical Research Institute, said there were now realistic prospects both of identifying people earlier at risk of dementia and of therapeutic interventions that will delay dementia or slow its progression.

“But if that is to become a reality then significantly greater investment is needed in dementia research,” Professor Schofield said.

“To protect the health and care budget from a significant blowout in the decades to come, a dramatic increase is needed in dementia research now to identify therapeutic interventions that will prevent or modify the progression of dementia.”

The report includes projections showing that reducing the number of Australians who are physically inactive by 20 percent would result in 6 percent fewer cases of dementia in 2050. Numbers would be reduced a further 6 percent by simply maintaining current trends in improvements in management of high blood pressure. These findings highlight that a significant number of dementia cases might be prevented through lifestyle and health interventions.

Associate Professor Marc Budge, President of Alzheimer's Australia, said that it was critical that the new initiatives needed to address the dementia epidemic had strong national leadership that could drive dementia research, program development and quality service delivery.

"Since its creation in the early 1980s, Alzheimer's Australia has been at the forefront of advocacy on behalf of people living with dementia and established a strong partnership with successive Australian Governments in establishing priorities and program development," he said.

"The state and territory members of Alzheimer's Australia have pioneered new care and support programs, developed ground-breaking education and training products, and raised awareness about dementia within the Australian community."

Mr Rees said that the landmark decision in the 2005 budget to make dementia a National Health Priority and provide additional funding through the Dementia Initiative was a world first.

"The new report underlines the need for further action in key areas, including research into the cause and prevention of dementia, as well as more support for those providing the diagnosis of dementia and early intervention," he said.

"On 21 September, World Alzheimer's Day, Alzheimer's Australia will publish its vision for the expansion of the Dementia Initiative in the 2010 budget."

**The full report and executive summary can be accessed at [www.alzheimers.org.au](http://www.alzheimers.org.au)**

**For interviews with Glenn Rees , Lynne Pezzullo, Marc Budge or Peter Schofield please contact Josh Rosner on 0407 232 212.**

# Key Facts about Dementia

- There are an estimated 245,000 people with dementia in Australia
- That is expected to increase to 591,000 by 2030
- And again to 1.13 million people by 2050
- Each week, there are 1300 new cases of dementia in Australia
- That will grow to 591,000 by 2030
- And to 1,130,000 by 2050
- Dementia is the fourth most common cause of death after heart disease, stroke and lung cancer
- Dementia has an impact on every part of the health and care system
- Australia faces a shortage of more than 150,000 paid and unpaid carers within a generation. The direct care cost of dementia is already estimated at \$5.4 billion per annum
- The cost of replacing all family carers with paid carers is estimated at \$5.5 billion per annum.
- 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
- 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
- Dementia is already the single cause of disability in older Australians (aged 65 years or older)
- The ageing of the population and changing family structures will lead to a higher demand on community and residential care services

## 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 normal emotional reactions. 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.

Dementia is fatal and, as yet, there is no cure. It is not a normal part of ageing.

**National Dementia Helpline: 1800 100 500**  
**Dementia is a National Health Priority**