

24 November 2006



Dementia prevalence and incidence among Australians who do not speak English at home

Executive Summary of
a Report by Access Economics Pty Limited for
Alzheimer's Australia

FOREWORD


On behalf of the National Cross Cultural Dementia Network, Alzheimer's Australia commissioned Access Economics to undertake a study on the prevalence and incidence of dementia amongst Australians from a Culturally and Linguistically Diverse (CALD) background. This work was designed to assist in understanding the need for services capable of meeting the special requirements of people with dementia in this group.

The work was made more difficult given the paucity of available data and the definitional problems surrounding these data. Language spoken at home was used as a marker for identifying the CALD community although the question of cultural identity, and the consequent demand for services sensitive to those cultures, goes well beyond simple questions of language. A more detailed analysis may be possible once the results of the 2006 Census become available.

This study assumes that prevalence and incidence rates for the CALD community are comparable to those for the Australian population as a whole. This may not be the case but, in the absence of any information to the contrary, no better course of action was possible. It is possible that different cultural groups have different rates of dementia but Australian research to confirm or refute this thesis does not currently exist.

The report has included analysis of Indigenous people where the available statistics have identified that they speak a language other than English at home. While Indigenous people are not normally included when discussing CALD issues, given the nature of this report and the importance of the issue in certain jurisdictions, particularly the Northern Territory, the decision was made to include the information within this report. The qualifications on the lack of specific epidemiological evidence relating to CALD populations also apply to Indigenous communities.

Alzheimer's Australia wishes to thank Lundbeck Australia Pty Ltd for the unrestricted grant that made this report possible.



Glenn Rees
National Executive Director
Alzheimer's Australia
24 November 2006

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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

A substantial proportion of Australia's population aged over 60 years of age are migrants from non-English speaking backgrounds, with a variety of cultural customs, traditions and values. In 2005, 16% of people aged over 60 years (approximately one-sixth) spoke a language other than English at home, while 33% of people aged over 60 years (one-third) were born in a country other than Australia. Although these culturally and linguistically diverse (CALD) Australians may have been fluent in English, studies show that the language most recently acquired is lost first for people with dementia. There is also some evidence that people from some non-English speaking backgrounds may present later to services such as memory clinics, even if there is a bilingual specialist available. These Australians have an equal right to access affordable, quality dementia assessment and care services, which can only be available for them if specialist resources are better developed and more widely known.

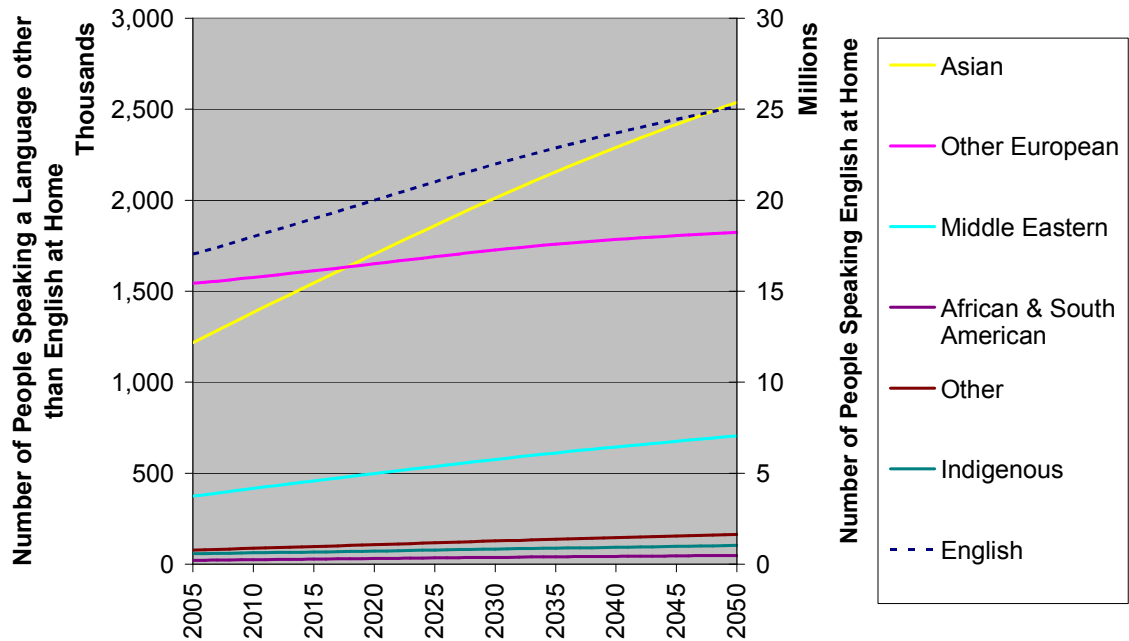
Access Economics was commissioned by Alzheimer's Australia in May 2006 to estimate the prevalence and incidence of dementia for people from CALD backgrounds in Australia. The findings are the subject of this report. The report provides a 'snapshot' of the prevalence and incidence of dementia among people from CALD backgrounds in Australia, based on current Australian Bureau of Statistics (ABS) demographic data. A more detailed future study is planned when 2006 Census data become available, which will provide a greater level of disaggregation by cultural group and by local government area.

Methods

This analysis has used established prevalence and incidence rates, together with previous estimates of dementia prevalence and incidence in Australia. There is not a strong case for using prevalence and incidence rates from other countries (of origin) as risk and preventive factors may differ in Australia. This assumption is more of a risk for Indigenous people, in respect of whom more research is needed on prevalence rates.

ABS population data from four Australian censuses (1986, 1991, 1996 and 2001) – by single year of age, gender, State/Territory and language spoken at home, grouped as English, other European, Asian, Middle Eastern, African and South American, Other and Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander (Indigenous) languages – were used to estimate the number of people from CALD backgrounds in Australia and Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples from 2001 to 2050.

AUSTRALIAN POPULATION, BY LANGUAGE SPOKEN AT HOME, 2005-2050



Left axis: Other languages spoken at home. Right axis: English spoken at home.

Findings

Currently, some **12.4% of Australians with dementia – around one in eight – do not speak English at home.** People with dementia who do not speak English at home comprise:

- ❑ 12.9% – around 1 in 8 – NSW residents with dementia;
- ❑ 16.9% – around 1 in 6 – Victorians with dementia;
- ❑ 6.8% – around 1 in 15 – Queenslanders with dementia;
- ❑ 12.0% – more than 1 in 9 – South Australians with dementia;
- ❑ 3.5% – around 1 in 29 – Tasmanians with dementia;
- ❑ 11.5% – around 1 in 9 – West Australians with dementia;
- ❑ 21.0% – more than 1 in 5 – Northern Territorians with dementia; and
- ❑ 14.7% – around 1 in 7 – people with dementia in the ACT.

Higher proportions of people who do not speak English at home are directly related to significant cultural populations in particular jurisdictions (for example, Indigenous people in the Northern Territory and Greek people in Victoria).

Overall in the period 2001 to 2050 there is projected to be a fall in the proportion of Australians speaking English (83.8% to 82.4%) and other European languages (7.6% to 6.0%), with a greater proportion speaking Asian (6.0% to 8.3%) and Middle Eastern (1.8% to 2.3%) languages.

DEMENTIA PREVALENCE BY LANGUAGE SPOKEN AT HOME, 2005-2050, AUSTRALIA

	2005	2010	2020	2030	2040	2050
English	179,384	214,106	295,603	415,518	553,808	646,973
% total pwd	87.6%	88.3%	88.8%	89.3%	89.5%	88.5%
Other European	19,838	21,638	26,996	33,725	40,416	46,850
% total pwd	9.7%	8.9%	8.1%	7.2%	6.5%	6.4%
Asian	4,199	5,027	7,662	12,060	18,617	28,105
% total pwd	2.0%	2.1%	2.3%	2.6%	3.0%	3.8%
Middle Eastern	1,076	1,312	2,048	3,175	4,716	6,762
% total pwd	0.5%	0.5%	0.6%	0.7%	0.8%	0.9%
African & South American	48	57	91	154	258	424
% total pwd	0.0%	0.0%	0.0%	0.0%	0.0%	0.1%
Other	160	201	329	549	892	1,393
% total pwd	0.1%	0.1%	0.1%	0.1%	0.1%	0.2%
Indigenous	145	158	202	276	381	521
% total pwd	0.1%	0.1%	0.1%	0.1%	0.1%	0.1%
Total	204,851	242,500	332,931	465,458	619,089	731,028
% total pwd	100.00%	100.00%	100.00%	100.00%	100.00%	100.00%

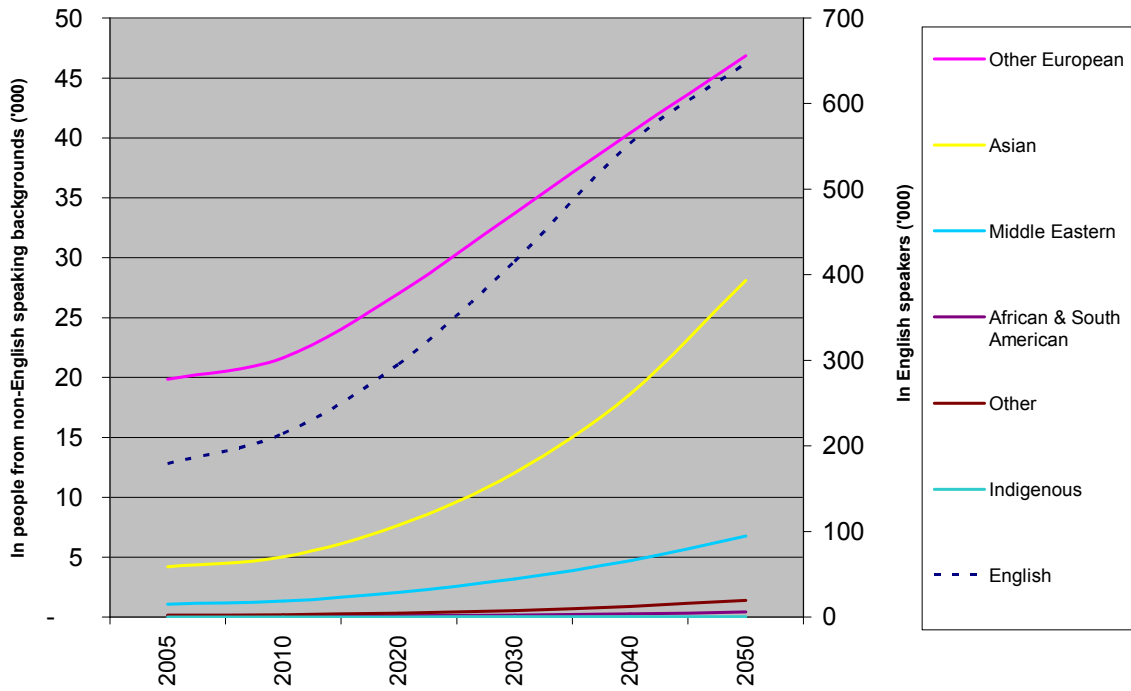
Note: people with dementia (pwd)

The proportion of people with dementia (pwd) who speak English at home is projected to increase as a share of total prevalence and incidence to nearly 90%, before it starts to fall around 2040, reflecting that the oldest Australians are predominantly English speakers. In 2005, of those aged over 80 years, around 90% spoke English and around 8% spoke other European languages at home.

The proportion of populations who do not speak English at home varies between States and Territories. For example, in NSW in 2005, there were more non-English speakers than the population average and more Asian speakers than people speaking other European languages. In contrast, in the Northern Territory, 17% spoke Indigenous languages and in Victoria, 12% spoke other European languages, while 97% of Tasmanians speak English at home. The prevalence of dementia, however, is determined very much by the ethnicity of the oldest Australians, and this is less variable.

The report is a reminder that services at the regional and local level need to be responsive to the particular profiles of their non-English speaking populations. While language and communication are important factors in service delivery, so too are the variety of cultural customs, traditions and values practised by people from non-English speaking backgrounds.

DEMENTIA PREVALENCE IN PEOPLE WITH NON-ENGLISH SPEAKING BACKGROUNDS IN AUSTRALIA AND ENGLISH SPEAKERS, 2005-2050



Left axis: Other languages spoken at home. Right axis: English spoken at home.