

MEDIA RELEASE

A RAPIDLY AGEING AUSTRALIA

Wednesday 11th April 2018: The ARC Centre of Excellence in Population Ageing Research (CEPAR), in collaboration with Neuroscience Research Australia (NeuRA) has released new findings on cognitive ageing and decline trends in Australia. The report led by Professor Kaarin Anstey, CEPAR Chief Investigator and NHMRC Principal Research Fellow at NeuRA, highlights seven key modifiable lifestyle factors which are attributed to dementia; the rising numbers of people with dementia; and the increasing cost to families, carers, and the economy.

Dementia is the leading cause of disability among Australians over 65 and the second leading cause of death in Australia. In 2016, the direct costs alone of dementia were close to \$9 billion in Australia, with a predicted increase to \$12 billion by 2025.

Professor Kaarin Anstey said the critical report highlights the prevalence of dementia in Australia, which doubles every five years between ages 70 and 84, and how our ageing population trends will result in greater numbers of people with dementia.

“Australia’s ageing population is leading to an increasing number of Australians with the disease which will further impact individuals, society and the economy over the next decade,” said Prof Anstey.

The report also found that the **knowledge-base** around the cause of dementia in the senior community varied greatly, raising the need for in-depth dementia awareness workshops and community involvement.

“While some detrimental attributing factors to dementia such as smoking and alcohol consumption were known, other factors connected to cognitive health were unknown to over 95% of the sample population,” Prof Anstey said.

“This highlights the need for increased local community engagement and advocacy.”

Anstey has estimated that close to 50% of dementia cases can be attributed to **seven key modifiable lifestyle factors**; midlife hypertension, diabetes, low educational attainment, smoking, physical inactivity, mid-life obesity, and depression.

The impact of dementia goes far beyond individual health. The report noted there are direct, indirect and intangible costs of dementia for the wider society and significant indirect costs to Australia's economy. For example, dementia patients and those who care for them often have to withdraw from the workforce.

For someone with moderate dementia, the care hours are 17 per week on average, while severe cases involve hours similar to a full-time job. In 2016, the cost of foregone work hours was estimated to be \$5.5 billion.

The report also brought attention to an under-researched area of cognitive ageing, **financial frailty**. CEPAR Director, Scientia Professor John Piggott, said what is clear from the 2018 CEPAR report is that those with cognitive impairment are more susceptible to poor financial decision-making.

"Our retirement income system is very complex and requires a lot of active decisions. We are only beginning to think about how population ageing will affect the decision-making ability of older cohorts and what insights psychology and behavioural finance can bring," said Prof Piggott.

More than 400,000 Australians are currently living with dementia. These figures have been revised upward from past projections. More accurate projections of dementia rates out to 2030 are critical to enable government policy makers and community services to better plan for the impact of cognitive decline in the future.

Commenting on the outcomes of the report, Professor Anstey said further investment into ageing research is needed to identify more risk factors, adapt the workplace for older workers, and develop strategies to guide financial decision-making in older age.

"We need to develop better diagnostic tests and assessments, increase community education to ensure risk factors attributed to dementia are better managed, and support carers to reduce carer distress in the broader community," Prof Anstey said.

Media

Liz Courtney

NeuRA Head of Media and Communications

E: l.courtney@neura.edu.au

M: 0409 225 447

Katrina Usman

NeuRA Media and Communications Officer

E: k.usman@neura.edu.au

M: 0432 760 940

Media assets and full report '*Cognitive ageing and decline: Insights from recent research*' available online at: neura.edu.au/neura-cepar/