



Preventive Health SA Bill 2024

Dementia Australia Submission

July 2024

Dementia Australia

Dementia Australia is the peak dementia advocacy organisation in Australia.

Our organisation engages with people with dementia, their families and carers in our activities, planning, policy and decision-making, ensuring we capture the diversity of the living experience of dementia across Australia.

Our advocacy amplifies the voices of people living with dementia by sharing their stories and helping inform and inspire others. As the trusted source of information, education and support services, we advocate for positive change for people living with dementia, their families and carers, and support vital research across a range of dementia-related fields.

The Dementia Australia Policy team can be contacted at policyteam@dementia.org.au. We have dedicated policy and advocacy, consumer engagement and community development staff in South Australia.

Dementia in Australia

Dementia is the term used to describe the symptoms of a large group of complex neurocognitive conditions which cause progressive decline in a person's functioning.

Dementia is not just memory loss - symptoms can also include changes in speech, reasoning, visuospatial abilities, emotional responses, social skills and physical functioning. There are many types of dementia, including Alzheimer's disease, vascular dementia, frontotemporal dementia and Lewy body disease. Dementia is ultimately a terminal condition.

In 2024, it is estimated there are more than 421,000 people living with all forms of dementia. This figure is projected to increase to more than 812,500 by 2054.¹ Dementia does not just affect older people. It is estimated that almost 29,000 people in Australia currently live with younger onset dementia - a diagnosis of dementia under the age of 65.²

¹ Dementia Australia (2024) [Dementia in Australia 2024-2054](#).

² Dementia Australia (2024) [Dementia in Australia 2024-2054](#).

A Preventive Health SA Bill is welcomed

Dementia Australia welcomes the opportunity to provide feedback on the Preventive Health SA Bill 2024. We are supportive of an increased focus on prevention of non-communicable disease in South Australia, and the creation of a preventive health function in SA Government.

Dementia is often overlooked in preventive health strategies, due to misunderstanding of the condition and association with ageing.

Dementia is a leading cause of disease burden

In September 2023, Alzheimer's Disease International urged governments around the world to urgently fund dementia risk reduction research, education and support services, and to make risk reduction a core element of National Dementia Plans.³

Dementia is major public health concern and a leading cause of disease burden among Australians aged 65 and over.⁴ It is the second leading cause of death for Australians and the leading cause of death for women.⁵ In 2023, there were an equivalent of 15 people with dementia per 1,000 Australians.⁶

In South Australia, there are more than 34,700 people living with all forms of dementia, and this is expected to increase to more than 55,000 by 2054.⁷ Of these, there more than 2,600 people living with younger onset dementia, diagnosed under the age of 65.⁸

Some population groups have a higher risk of dementia, including First Nations people. Studies suggest that the prevalence of dementia in First Nations people is around 3 to 5 times higher than in the general population. The burden of disease due to dementia in First Nations people is more than twice as high than for the general population, and the rate of death is 57% higher.⁹

Without interventions to help reduce the risk of dementia, its burden among First Nations people will continue to grow in coming years. It is a priority to develop and evaluate culturally responsive programs, interventions and policies to reduce dementia risk factors across the life course and prevent or delay the onset of cognitive decline and dementia in First Nations people, including by targeting social determinants of health.¹⁰

Dementia has broad social impacts, including being a key factor in the demand for primary health care and aged care services. People with dementia use more primary health care services than the general population, have a higher rate of hospital admissions than others with similar illnesses, and experience longer and more frequent admissions and

³ Alzheimer's Disease International (2023) [World Alzheimer Report 2023](#).

⁴ Australian Institute of Health and Welfare (2024) [Dementia in Australia](#).

⁵ Australian Institute of Health and Welfare (2024) [Dementia in Australia](#).

⁶ Australian Institute of Health and Welfare (2024) [Dementia in Australia](#).

⁷ Dementia Australia (2024) [Dementia in Australia 2024-2054](#).

⁸ Dementia Australia (2024) [Dementia in Australia 2024-2054 Dementia Prevalence Data Estimates and Projections – Younger Onset Dementia](#)

⁹ Australian Institute of Health and Welfare (2024) [Population health impacts of dementia among First Nations people](#).

¹⁰ Australian Institute of Health and Welfare (2024) [Population health impacts of dementia among First Nations people](#).

readmissions.¹¹ Hospitalisation in people living with dementia is associated with high economic costs, with health care expenditure for people with moderate to severe dementia double that of people without dementia.¹²

Around half of people living in permanent residential aged care have dementia, and this is associated with need for high levels of care and higher funding levels.¹³

Caring for someone living with dementia also impacts on family members such as spouses or children, contributing to decreased economic participation and increasing the use of health services by carers.¹⁴

Reducing the risk of dementia

A 2020 Lancet Review identified twelve evidence-based modifiable risk factors for dementia. These are lower education, hypertension, hearing impairment, smoking, obesity, depression, physical inactivity, diabetes, low social contact, excessive alcohol consumption, traumatic brain injury and air pollution. Together these risk factors are thought to account for around 40% of dementia cases globally.¹⁵

In Australia, six modifiable risk factors are estimated to account for 43% of dementia cases, being tobacco use, overweight and obesity, physical inactivity, high blood pressure in midlife (35–64 years), high blood plasma glucose and impaired kidney function.¹⁶

The impact of repeated traumatic brain injury on brain health is also increasingly under scrutiny in Australia. Increased exposure to repeated traumatic brain injury increases the risk neurodegenerative disease in later life.

Research has identified an increasingly strong causal link between repeated traumatic brain injury and chronic traumatic encephalopathy, a type of preventable dementia which progressively affects brain function. There are several different population groups at risk of chronic traumatic encephalopathy, including contact and collision sports participants, domestic and family violence survivors and military personnel. Chronic traumatic encephalopathy is a preventable form of dementia.¹⁷

The Lancet Review called for ambitious prevention activity to mitigate the risk of dementia over the life course. Both public health programs and individually tailored interventions are required. Preventive health approaches should address high-risk population groups, aiming to increase social, cognitive and physical activity and vascular health.¹⁸

¹¹ Livingston et.al. (2020) [Dementia prevention, intervention, and care: 2020 Report of the Lancet Commission](#), Vol 396, Issue 10248.

¹² Livingston et.al. (2020) [Dementia prevention, intervention, and care: 2020 Report of the Lancet Commission](#), Vol 396, Issue 10248.

¹³ Australian Institute of Health and Welfare (2024) [Dementia in Australia](#).

¹⁴ Livingston et.al. (2020) [Dementia prevention, intervention, and care: 2020 Report of the Lancet Commission](#), Vol 396, Issue 10248.

¹⁵ Livingston et.al. (2020) [Dementia prevention, intervention, and care: 2020 Report of the Lancet Commission](#), Vol 396, Issue 10248.

¹⁶ Australian Institute of Health and Welfare, (2024) [Dementia burden due to risk factors](#).

¹⁷ Concussion and CTE Coalition (2024) [Concussion and Chronic Traumatic Encephalopathy in Australia](#).

¹⁸ Livingston et.al. (2020) [Dementia prevention, intervention, and care: 2020 Report of the Lancet Commission](#), Vol 396, Issue 10248.

Approach to the Preventive Health SA Bill

The significance of dementia as a public health concern underlies our recommendation that the forthcoming Strategic Plan for Preventive Health under the Bill include dementia as a priority health issue.

Dementia Australia recommends that the Bill mandate in Section 9 that the development of the Strategic Plan for Preventive Health involve broad community consultation to identify priority population groups and health areas for action.

The Bill should also require that all South Australian government agencies be accountable for actions under the Strategic Plan for Preventive Health, to ensure that preventive health strategies are embedded across the domains relevant to the social and commercial determinants of health.

In addition, either a person impacted by dementia or a professional in dementia risk reduction should be included as a member of the Preventive Health SA Council. There should also be good links between the Strategic Plan for Preventive Health and the South Australian statewide Dementia Action Plan which is to be developed by the Department of Health and Wellbeing.

Recommendations:

- 1) Include dementia as a priority health issue in the development of the Strategic Plan for Preventive Health.
- 2) Ensure that there are strong links between strategies and targets in the Strategic Plan for Preventive Health and the South Australian statewide Dementia Action Plan.
- 3) Include a focus on First Nations brain health in the Strategic Plan for Preventive Health.
- 4) Ensure that membership of the Preventive Health SA Council include either a person impacted by dementia or a professional in dementia risk reduction.
- 5) Mandate in Section 9 of the Preventive Health SA Bill that the development of the Strategic Plan for Preventive Health involves broad community consultation to identify priority population groups and health areas for action.
- 6) Through the Preventive Health SA Bill, require that all South Australian government agencies be accountable for actions under the Strategic Plan for Preventive Health.

Thank you for the opportunity to raise the important issue of dementia risk reduction with you as part of the SA Government's increasing focus on preventive health. Dementia Australia would be happy to provide any further information you may need and can be contacted on [**policyteam@dementia.org.au**](mailto:policyteam@dementia.org.au).