

# Alzheimer's disease and other dementias

Dementia is a term that generally refers to a variety of brain disorders. Different physical changes to the brain cause different dementias. Some are reversible, meaning that they can be treated and cured, while others are irreversible, meaning that there is no cure.

Symptoms include:

- Loss of memory
- Changes in judgment and reasoning
- Difficulty performing familiar tasks
- Problems with language
- Changes in mood and behaviour

These symptoms worsen over time.

Due to decline in brain function, a person will eventually find it increasingly difficult to function at work, in relationships or in everyday activities.

Alzheimer's disease is the most common form of dementia, accounting for almost two-thirds of all cases. It is irreversible and eventually fatal. Other dementias include vascular dementia, frontotemporal dementia (including Pick's disease), Creutzfeldt-Jakob disease and Lewy body dementia.

There is no cure for these diseases, but medication, lifestyle changes and support can help manage symptoms.

Dementia is not a normal part of aging, but age is the biggest risk factor. Dementia is most often diagnosed in people 65 and older. It can begin to develop well before signs appear, even as early as age 40. And yet, one in four Canadians delays seeing a doctor up to a year or more after noticing the first signs of dementia.<sup>1</sup>

Sometimes conditions like depression, thyroid disease, infections or side-effects of medications can produce dementia-like symptoms. Early diagnosis is essential to ensuring appropriate treatment.

If the symptoms are caused by dementia, an early diagnosis provides:

- Access to medication that may help manage symptoms
- Time to plan for the future
- Knowledge about the disease process and information about available support

## What the numbers say

In 2011, 747,000 Canadians were living with dementia. That's 14.9 per cent of Canadians 65 and older.<sup>2</sup>

By 2031, this figure will reach 1.4 million.<sup>2</sup>

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## Economic impact

Today, the combined direct (medical) and indirect (lost earnings) cost of dementia in Canada is \$33 billion. If nothing changes, this number will skyrocket to \$293 billion a year by 2040.<sup>2</sup>

## Impact on caregivers

One in five Canadians aged 45 and older provides some form of care to seniors living with long-term health problems.<sup>3</sup>

A quarter of all family caregivers are seniors themselves; a third of them (more than 200,000) are older than 75.<sup>3</sup>

In 2011, family caregivers spent 444 million unpaid hours a year looking after someone with dementia. This represents \$11 billion in lost income. By 2040, caregivers will be devoting a staggering 1.2 billion unpaid hours a year.<sup>2</sup>

Dementia also takes a tremendous toll on family caregivers. Up to 75 per cent will develop psychological illnesses while up to 32 per cent suffer from depression.<sup>4</sup>

## Global impact of dementia

As of 2010 more than 35.6 million people worldwide are living with dementia, or more than the total population of Canada.<sup>4</sup>

The global prevalence of dementia will double every 20 years to 65.7 million in 2030, and 115.4 million in 2050.<sup>4</sup>

In 2010, the total health-care cost for people with dementia exceeded one per cent of the global gross domestic product (GDP), or US \$604 billion.<sup>4</sup>

## The time to act is now

In 2011 the first wave of the baby boomers turned 65.

The risk for dementia doubles every 5 years after age 65.<sup>4</sup>

Without fundamental changes in research investment and service delivery, dementia has the potential to overwhelm Canadian families and our health-care system.

Canada needs a national dementia plan, including improved education, better care and service delivery and increased funding for research.

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The Alzheimer Society calls on all levels of Canadian government to join the growing number of countries that have already implemented a national dementia strategy.

**For more information, please visit [www.alzheimer.ca](http://www.alzheimer.ca).**

## Footnotes:

1. Survey: Benefits of early diagnosis. Alzheimer Society of Canada, 2011.
2. A new way of looking at the impact of dementia in Canada. Alzheimer Society, 2012.
3. Eldercare: What We Know Today. Statistics Canada, October 2008.
4. World Alzheimer Report 2012, Dementia: A public health priority. Alzheimer's Disease International (ADI)



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