

Australian women's knowledge about preventing dementia

Background

Dementia is an umbrella term for several conditions that cause damage to the brain and a decline in brain function over time. Dementia affects memory, thinking, reasoning, communicating, and the ability to carry out everyday activities – more than would be expected with normal ageing.¹

Some of the causes of dementia are outside a person's control (e.g. their genetics), but research suggests that up to 45% of cases may be preventable.² Factors that can reduce a person's risk of developing dementia include engaging in social activities, eating healthy food, not smoking, reducing alcohol consumption, and being physically active.²

Dementia disproportionately affects women: there are over 440,000 people with dementia in Australia and close to two-thirds (63%) of them are women.³ Dementia is also the leading cause of death of women in Australia.³ It's therefore important that women are aware of actions they can take to reduce their risk of developing the condition.



Dementia affects memory, thinking, reasoning, communicating, and the **ability to carry out everyday activities.**

To help inform the design of public health initiatives aimed at reducing the impact of dementia in Australia, the 2025 National Women's Health Survey assessed:

- women's awareness of dementia as a leading cause of death
- women's knowledge of some of the factors that might help to prevent or slow the onset of the condition (using questions from the Dementia Knowledge Assessment Scale⁴).

Dementia as a leading cause of death

Only around 1 in 6 women (16%) knew that dementia was the leading cause of death among women in Australia.



Dementia **disproportionately** affects women.

Ways to reduce dementia risk

To assess women's knowledge of some of the ways to reduce their risk of developing dementia, we asked women to indicate whether maintaining a healthy lifestyle, having high blood pressure, or having hearing problems influence the risk of developing dementia.



4 in 10 (41%)

women correctly answered that maintaining a healthy lifestyle reduces the risk of developing the most common forms of dementia.



3 in 10 (29%)

women correctly answered that having high blood pressure increases a person's risk of developing dementia. High blood pressure damages blood vessels and can deprive the brain of oxygen and nutrients it needs to function properly.



2 in 10 (23%)

women correctly answered that having hearing problems increases a person's risk of developing dementia. The brain needs stimulation to stay healthy, and uncorrected hearing loss means the brain is missing out on input. It is also easier to stay socially connected when you can hear properly, and maintaining social interaction is an important way to keep your brain healthy as you get older.



Few women in Australia are aware of the ways they might be able to **prevent or slow** the onset of dementia.

Importance of early diagnosis

Being diagnosed with dementia as early as possible allows people to access support services sooner, which may help them manage their symptoms and remain independent for longer. However, only around half (47%) of women knew that being diagnosed early improves quality of life for most people with dementia.

So what?

- Dementia disproportionately affects women, but only 1 in 6 are aware that it is the leading cause of death of women in Australia.
- Some causes of dementia are outside a person's control, but there are actions people can take to reduce their risk of developing the condition. However, few women in Australia are aware of the ways they might be able to prevent or slow the onset of dementia.
- These findings highlight the need for initiatives to increase women's awareness of what they can do to reduce their risk of developing dementia, and for public health policies and initiatives to support women to make those changes in their lives.
- The findings also highlight the need for initiatives to increase awareness of the early signs and symptoms of dementia so that women have the best chance of receiving an early diagnosis.



References

- 1 World Health Organization. (2025, March 31). *Dementia*. World Health Organization. <https://www.who.int/news-room/fact-sheets/detail/dementia>
- 2 Livingston, G., Huntley, J., Liu, K. Y., et al. (2024). Dementia prevention, intervention, and care: 2024 report of the Lancet standing Commission. *The Lancet*, 404(10452), 572–628. [https://doi.org/10.1016/S0140-6736\(24\)01296-0](https://doi.org/10.1016/S0140-6736(24)01296-0)
- 3 Australian Institute of Health and Welfare (2025). *Dementia in Australia*. <https://www.aihw.gov.au/reports/dementia/dementia-in-aus/contents/summary>
- 4 Annear, M.J., Toye, C., Elliott, K.E.J. et al. (2017). Dementia knowledge assessment scale (DKAS): confirmatory factor analysis and comparative subscale scores among an international cohort. *BMC Geriatrics* 17, 168. <https://doi.org/10.1186/s12877-017-0552-y>

About this short report

The Jean Hailes National Women’s Health Survey (NWHS) is an annual survey designed to help us better understand the issues that affect women in Australia, their attitudes and behaviours, and the health information and policy changes that will help improve their health and wellbeing.

The 2025 NWHS explored Australian women’s understanding of dementia, including risk and protective factors. It was conducted online in mid-2025 with a national sample, but only in English.

A total of 3,629 women aged 18 and over residing in Australia participated in the survey.

The 2025 NWHS was conducted in collaboration with Dementia Australia and with funding from the Australian Government Department of Health, Disability and Ageing.

For more information about the NWHS, see the technical report on our [website](#).