

Facts: Alzheimer's disease and other dementias

What are Alzheimer's disease and dementia?

Alzheimer's is a disease of the brain. It erases memory, steals the ability to think, and eventually can make simple daily tasks, such as eating or getting dressed, impossible. It robs independence and ultimately takes life.

Alzheimer's disease affects men and women of all races, religions and socio-economic backgrounds. It is not a normal part of aging. In fact, "early onset" is an inherited form of Alzheimer's disease that strikes between the ages of 30 and 60, although it accounts for less than 5% of cases.

Dementia is an umbrella term for a variety of neurological disorders such as Alzheimer's disease, which accounts for 64% of all cases. But other forms of dementia include Vascular dementia, Frontotemporal dementia, Creutzfeldt-Jakob disease and Lewy body dementia.

Prevalence of dementia is increasing at an alarming rate

The majority of people with Alzheimer's disease are over the age of 65. Huge numbers of baby boomers are now entering the years of highest risk. If they live long enough, **1 in 3** will eventually develop Alzheimer's or another dementia.

New statistics also confirm that younger people are increasingly stricken with dementia. **Of the 500,000 Canadians living with dementia**, 15 per cent, or **1 in 6**, are under the age of 65.

Women make up almost three-quarters of Canadians with Alzheimer's disease.

What the numbers say: Ontario

- Over 200,000 Ontarians over the age of 65 – or one out of ten seniors - have dementia, an increase of 16% over the past four years.
- By 2020, nearly one quarter of a million seniors in Ontario will be living with dementia.¹

Physical activity can prevent or delay the onset

New research is showing that lifestyle and environmental, as well as genetic, play a role in the development of Alzheimer's disease or another dementia. Exercise has been proven to be particularly important.

- Being physically active is associated with a 38% reduced risk of developing Alzheimer's disease.²

¹ R. Hopkins, *Geriatric Psychiatry Programme, Clinical/Research Bulletin*, Number 16, 2010

- If only 10% of currently inactive Ontarians were to become active in accordance to the Canadian Physical Activity Guidelines, up to 1,200 individuals could decrease their risk of developing Alzheimer's.

Impact of dementia: the social and economic burden

Caregiving is a critical issue for people living with dementia.

According to Ontario home care assessments, most people with dementia have at least one person providing unpaid care. Primary caregivers are most often spouses (31%) or adult children and in-laws (54%).³ They face many challenges because of their role. In Ontario today, caregivers:

- Spend **100 million** unpaid hours caring for people with dementia. By 2020, they'll be offering **140 million, an increase of 65%**.
- Experience work and declines in health. 71% of caregivers report having problems with work and 14% had to retire early.
- Experience worsening health. 35% reported declines in general health and this number increased to 60% among live-in caregivers.⁴

Dementia is more than just an important health concern. It has the potential to overwhelm our health-care system if fundamental changes are not made in research funding and care delivery. In Ontario:

- The annual total economic burden (including direct, indirect and opportunity costs) of dementia in Ontario is expected to increase on average **by more than \$770 million per year** through 2020.
- In Ontario, more than 90% of people with dementia are living with two or more additional medical conditions such as diabetes, heart failure or pulmonary disease. They struggle to manage these other conditions because of cognitive problems, which can result in preventable hospitalization.⁵
- Dementia results in more years lived with disability than stroke, heart disease and all forms of cancer.
- Over 70% of those living in Ontario's long-term care homes have Alzheimer's disease or other dementia.

The Alzheimer Society of Ontario (ASO)

With a network of 30 Chapters across Ontario, we offer **Help for Today** through our programs and services for people living with Alzheimer's disease and other dementias and **Hope for Tomorrow...**[®] by funding research to find the cause and the cure.

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² Ontario Brain Institute, *The Role of Physical Activity in the Prevention and Management of Alzheimer's disease* .

³ Gill, et al, 2011, *Community Dwelling Adults with Dementia*, Institute for Clinical Evaluative Sciences.

⁴ The Alzheimer Society of Ontario, *Dementia Amidst Complexity*.

⁵ Ibid.