

For immediate release

Alzheimer Society campaign tackles stigma of dementia

See me, not my disease. Let's talk about dementia. Toronto, ON, January 2, 2013 – Imagine a close friend tells you she has dementia. Would you avoid her for fear of being embarrassed by what she might say or do? If you answered yes, you're not alone. According to a recent poll by Alzheimer's Disease International, 40 per cent of people with dementia reported they had been avoided or treated differently after diagnosis. It's no surprise, then, that one in four respondents cited stigma as a reason to conceal their diagnosis.

That's why, this January during Alzheimer Awareness Month, the Alzheimer Society is launching a nation-wide campaign called **"See me, not my disease. Let's talk about dementia."** Its goal is to address myths about the disease, shift attitudes and make it easier to talk about dementia. Canadians are also invited to test their attitudes and perceptions in an online quiz at the Society's website, www.alzheimer.ca.

Stereotypes and misinformation are what prevent people with dementia from getting the help they need and stop others from taking the disease seriously. Dementia is more than having the occasional 'senior moment' or losing your keys. The truth is it's a progressive degenerative brain disorder that affects each person differently. **It's fatal and there is no cure.**

"Dementia really challenges the values we hold as a society and what it means to be human," says Mary Schulz, Director of Education at the Alzheimer Society of Canada. "We need to stop avoiding this disease and rethink how we interact with people with dementia. Only by understanding the disease and talking more openly about it, can we face our own fears and support individuals and families living with dementia."

Today, 747,000 Canadians have dementia. While dementia can affect people as young as 40 years of age, the risk doubles every five years after 65.

"A diagnosis of dementia doesn't immediately render a person incapable of working or carrying on with their daily life," explains Schulz. **"Many people with this disease tell us they want to continue contributing to their community and remain engaged for as long as possible."** In fact growing evidence shows that involving people with dementia in meaningful activities that speak to their strengths helps to slow the progression of the disease and will improve their well-being. **"Inclusion benefits all of us,"** adds Schulz.

The number of Canadians with dementia is expected to double to 1.4 million in the next 20 years, and Anne Harrison, 60, whose husband has Alzheimer's disease, understands what is at stake. "If people knew more about dementia, they could be more supportive. People aren't ashamed of cancer. So, why should we be ashamed of Alzheimer's?"

To help change the conversation, Canadians can do their part if they

- Learn the facts about dementia. Help to dispel inaccurate information to change **society's attitudes and opinions towards people with the** disease.
- **Stop making jokes about Alzheimer's** which trivialize the condition. **We don't tolerate** racial jokes, yet dementia-related jokes are common.
- Maintain relationships with people with dementia at home, in the community or at work, especially as the disease progresses.

To learn more about the **Let's talk about dementia** campaign, visit www.alzheimer.ca

Proudly supported by the KPMG Foundation

About the Alzheimer Society

The Alzheimer Society is Canada's leading nationwide health charity for people living with Alzheimer's disease and other dementias. Active in communities right across Canada, the Society offers help for today through programs and services for people living with dementia and hope for tomorrow by funding research to find the cause and the cure.

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