

Dementia's rising numbers spell trouble for Canada's health-care system

Alzheimer Society of Canada releases new study "A new way of looking at the impact of dementia in Canada"

Toronto, ON, September 27, 2012 – According to a new study commissioned by the Alzheimer Society of Canada, the number of Canadians living with cognitive impairment, including dementia, now stands at 747,000 and is expected to increase to 1.4 million by 2031. These figures comprise not only Canadians diagnosed with dementias, including Alzheimer's disease, but also those with cognitive impairment, which frequently leads to the more degenerative forms.

"The numbers are getting worse and we need to act swiftly," says Naguib Gouda, CEO, Alzheimer Society of Canada. "We're now seeing dementia in almost 15 per cent of Canadians 65 and older, which gives us a clearer picture of the enormous impending challenges as Canadians continue to live longer."

The new study, "*A new way of looking at the impact of dementia in Canada*," also estimates the total direct (medical) and indirect (lost earnings) costs of dementia at \$33 billion annually today, and will skyrocket to \$293 billion annually by 2040.

Most revealing are the heightened pressures on family caregivers. In 2011, they spent a little over 444 million unpaid hours looking after someone with the disease. By 2040 they will be devoting a staggering 1.2 billion unpaid hours per year.

"The good news is that we're getting better at diagnosing dementia," says Gouda, "But what's concerning is that our current care systems are not resourced to meet the tremendous service needs throughout the lifespan of the disease. Too many caregivers are forced to quit their jobs or they develop their own health issues because of the strain."

Dementia is a progressive and degenerative disease that is fatal with no cure in sight. While age is the biggest risk factor, dementia can also occur in people in their 40s and 50s. Its progression varies from person to person and in some cases can last 10 to 20 years following diagnosis.

"With the baby boomer bulge well upon us, dementia is becoming so common that we can no longer afford to ignore it," warns Gouda. "We need to take this issue far more seriously and ensure we've got the right mechanisms in place to ease the pressures on an already stretched health-care system and lighten the load on families who are personally affected. Dementia requires nothing short of a national dementia plan. It's unacceptable and worrying that other countries like France, Australia, the United Kingdom and the United States have forged ahead and developed plans while Canada continues to drag its feet."

The Alzheimer Society first sounded the alarm of dementia's rising numbers with the release of its seminal report ***Rising Tide: The Impact of Dementia on Canadian Society*** in 2010. The report outlined a five-point action plan that includes:

- Increased funding for research into all aspects of dementia
- Earlier diagnosis and intervention
- Strengthened integration of primary, home and community care
- Enhanced skills and training of the dementia workforce
- Recognition of the needs and improved supports for caregivers

About the new data

The new data is based on analysis conducted for the Mental Health Commission of Canada in an effort to obtain prevalence and economic projections for selected mental disorders. The prevalence data was derived from a health research study done in 2004 by the Manitoba Centre for Health Policy that determined the number of people treated by physicians for cognitive impairment, including dementia, in that province. These prevalence rates were applied to Canadian population data to derive national prevalence figures which were, in turn, applied to the *Rising Tide* direct cost drivers to project economic impact. This research informed the development of the Mental Health Strategy for Canada released in May 2012. The Alzheimer Society commissioned RiskAnalytica to expand on the data to estimate indirect cost projections and costs associated with caregiving.

About Rising Tide

In 2010, the Alzheimer Society released its seminal report, *Rising Tide: The Impact of Dementia on Canadian Society*. The Society had commissioned RiskAnalytica, the same research firm engaged by the Mental Health Commission of Canada, to project the incidence, prevalence and economic costs of dementia over a 30-year period. *Rising Tide* relied on data from the Canadian Study of Health and Aging (1991), which interviewed and tested people, aged 65 and older, in their homes, for Alzheimer's disease and other forms of dementia. Risk Analytica was also commissioned by the Society to simulate the future impact of dementia.

About the Alzheimer Society

The Alzheimer Society is the leading nationwide health charity for people living with Alzheimer's disease and other dementias. Active in more than 150 communities across Canada, the Society offers **Help for Today** through our programs and services for people living with dementia and **Hope for Tomorrow...**® by funding research to find the cause and the cure.

For more information about the new data or the Alzheimer Society, please visit www.alzheimer.ca

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