

Media release – Alzheimer Awareness Month 2012
Let's face it! Get the facts. Know for sure.

DELAY IN SEEKING DIAGNOSIS FOR DEMENTIA SYMPTOMS RESULTS IN HUGE TREATMENT GAP FOR CANADIANS ACCORDING TO NEW ALZHEIMER SOCIETY SURVEY

This Alzheimer Awareness Month... Let's face it! Get the facts. Know for sure.

TORONTO, ON, January 4, 2012- Canadians are still dismissing symptoms of dementia as “just old age” based on survey results released today by the Alzheimer Society. Close to 50 per cent of Canadians lived a year or more with their symptoms before seeing a family doctor. Of these, 16 per cent waited more than 2 years. A delayed diagnosis results in a huge treatment gap and prevents people from getting valuable information about medications, support and better disease management.

To promote the benefits of early diagnosis, this January during Alzheimer Awareness the Alzheimer Society is launching its *Let's face it!* campaign.

The online survey, which was conducted by the Society in the fall of 2011, also revealed that the most common reason for the delay (53 per cent) was the belief that the symptoms were part of “old age” and would eventually go away. Another 39 per cent said their symptoms were episodic or didn't take them seriously enough. Over a quarter either refused to see a doctor or saw no need to go unless symptoms grew worse.

However, three-quarters of respondents – caregivers of people with dementia – admitted that they wished they had sought a diagnosis sooner to have access to treatments to manage symptoms. They also recognized other benefits of getting a diagnosis when shown a list of these. Seventy-eight per cent of respondents said that early diagnosis would help them put their legal and financial affairs in order; 69 per cent said it would keep the person with dementia at home longer, and allow the person to actively participate in decision-making. Sixty-two percent of respondents attributed better coping and living with the disease to early diagnosis.

“Symptoms of dementia are different from normal aging,” says Naguib Gouda, newly appointed CEO at the Alzheimer Society. “We need to help Canadians recognize the symptoms for what they are: signs of a brain disorder that will affect 1.1 million Canadians in the next 25 years. While we don't yet have a cure, we can offer treatment that may slow the progression of the disease, and a wealth of information to help people prepare for their future needs.”

Dr. Francine Lemire of the College of Family Physicians of Canada agrees. “Dementia is a complex disease but a diagnosis can be reassuring for both the person exhibiting symptoms and their family. With early diagnosis, medications can help minimize symptoms and improve quality of life.”

During Alzheimer Awareness Month, the Alzheimer Society encourages Canadians to face dementia by visiting its *Let's face it!* campaign site: www.alzheimerletsfaceit.ca There they can learn more about dementia and its warning signs and download a *Preparing for your doctor's visit* checklist. The site also features moving testimonials of caregivers and people with dementia who tell what early diagnosis has meant to them.

Boilerplate

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.