



## THE HON JUSTINE ELLIOT MP

### Minister for Ageing

#### MEDIA RELEASE

21 September 2009

#### **WORLD ALZHEIMER'S DAY – 'DIAGNOSING DEMENTIA: SEE IT SOONER'**

Australia will join 50 other countries including Argentina, South Korea, Venezuela, India, Israel, Greece, Belgium, Canada and the United Kingdom in marking World Alzheimer's Day today (September 21).

Minister for Ageing, Justine Elliot said: "This year World Alzheimer's Day will focus on recognising the signs of dementia early so that help and support can be sought sooner.

"Alzheimers can be a debilitating illness and family, friends, colleagues and health professionals play an instrumental part in helping recognise the early signs.

"Everyone should be aware of the early symptoms and if they have concerns about themselves or a friend or family member to talk to their GP or contact the National Dementia Helpline," Minister Elliot said.

Early signs of dementia are often subtle and difficult to recognise but may include changes in:

- Memory - being absent-minded or forgetful, getting lost in familiar environments;
- Orientation – difficulty remembering the year, date, month, day, names of friends and family;
- Behaviour – impaired judgement, changes in behaviour that seems out of character for the person;
- Emotions – uninterested in hobbies, mood swings, withdrawing socially; and
- Thinking – less flexible and/or difficulty mastering new tasks, finding the right word, starting new topics.

(Dementia Resource Guide [www.health.gov.au](http://www.health.gov.au))

In its advanced state it can cause people to experience periods of confusion, personality changes and loss of the ability to do everyday tasks.

Health experts believe that early intervention provides a greater opportunity to slow the progress of dementia.

"Australia has one of the longest life expectancies in the English speaking world.

"With longevity comes the greater possibility of dementia and related illnesses, increased numbers of people living with chronic diseases and multiple complex health conditions.

“The Rudd Government is providing funding for a co-ordinated approach to dementia including support services for people with dementia and their families today, workforce training to provide high level care and research to help us into the future.

“In the last two years the Rudd Government has provided nearly \$225 million to the Dementia Initiative, including increasing the number of Extended Aged Care at Home – Dementia community care packages, and more than \$384 million to the National Respite for Carers Program,” Minister Elliot said.

The Rudd Government recognises the importance of having a health and aged care system that responds to the challenges of an ageing population such as the expected increase in the number of people with dementia.

### **Alzheimers facts**

- Alzheimer’s is a progressive, degenerative disease that affects the brain. It is the most common form of dementia, accounting for between 50 per cent and 70 per cent of all dementia cases.
- It is estimated that there are currently about 18 million people worldwide with Alzheimer’s disease. This figure is projected to nearly double by 2025 to 34 million.
- Alzheimers is the most common cause of dementia accounting for more than half of all cases. In Australia it was estimated that there were 57,000 new cases of dementia in 2008.
- There are about 10,000 Australians under the age of 65 who have younger onset dementia.

If you would like to speak to someone about dementia and Alzheimers, call the [National Dementia Helpline](http://www.health.gov.au/internet/main/publishing.nsf/Content/ageing-dementia-recognising.htm) on **1800 100 500** or for more information on the early signs please visit <http://www.health.gov.au/internet/main/publishing.nsf/Content/ageing-dementia-recognising.htm>

**For more information, contact Mrs Elliot's office on (02) 6277 7280**