



THE HON JUSTINE ELLIOT MP

Minister for Ageing

MEDIA RELEASE

13 June 2008

\$2m funding for psychogeriatric research

The Australian Government is providing \$2 million in research funding to assist in the study of the care and treatment of people with psychogeriatric conditions in aged care homes.

Minister for Ageing, Mrs Justine Elliot made the announcement today on the NSW North Coast at the inaugural meeting of the Ministerial Conference on Ageing, drawing together State ministers for Ageing from around the nation.

Psycho-geriatrics include older people who have either an age-related illness or life long mental health problems. It also includes people who have diseases of the brain such as Alzheimer's, which tend to affect predominantly those who are old.

"As the population ages so the number of people with psycho-geriatric disorders will increase. This is the case because diseases of old age which cause mental illness will be more prevalent as the number of older people increases," Mrs Elliot said.

In April, the Federal Government asked the Department of Health and Ageing to prepare a national report into psychogeriatric care by Deputy Secretary, Ms Mary Murnane. It is expected to be released shortly and States will be asked to respond.

Announcing the funding today, Mr Elliot, said that, at present, three out of every four people living in aged care homes had some form of dementia or other psychiatric condition.

Although considerable funding has been allocated to research into dementia, including \$17.4 million allocated by the Government to Dementia Research Grants and \$7.2 million for Dementia Collaborative Research Centres, funding has not previously specifically targeted people with more severe psychogeriatric conditions.

This work is being undertaken collaboratively between the Department of Health and Ageing and the National Health and Medical Research Council. The NHMRC will be allocating additional funds to support this research.

"The care and treatment of people with psychogeriatric disorders, particular those with more severe conditions, in aged care homes is a complex issue that needs to be carefully looked at, and dealt with in a sensitive manner.

"A minority of people who live in aged care homes can behave aggressively or inappropriately towards other residents or staff, and place themselves and others at risk.

“This research funding will focus on developing medication and behaviour-management interventions to help ensure that people with psycho-geriatric disorders receive the treatment they need and deserve,” Mrs Elliot said.

Currently, there are 1.9 million Australians aged 70 and over, comprising 9.3 per cent of the population. Within 40 years, the number of people aged over 65 will almost triple.

Although Australia currently has a small group of people with more severe psychogeriatric conditions, that number is expected to grow with the overall ageing of the population.

Management strategies can be a combination of behavioural and/or medication management. Some conditions do not respond well to medication. Others require powerful medications to treat psychiatric disorders, or simpler medications such as antidepressants and tranquilisers. Behavioural management techniques have been found to be helpful in managing violent behaviours and preventing the escalation of aggressive behaviour.

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