

Living alone with dementia

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Aims and Objectives

The growing number of people living alone and the increasing number of people with dementia suggests that the number of people with dementia who live alone is set to rise. Yet there is often an underlying assumption in dementia and aged care policy of the support of a co-resident carer which is reflected in the design and delivery of services. Supporting people with dementia who live alone is becoming increasingly important and requires social policy and service delivery changes.

This project aimed to expand the body of knowledge about how people with dementia manage to live on their own including what coping strategies they employ, what services assist them, and how their informal networks support them. It also aimed to find out how case managers support this client group and to identify improvements that can be made to policies and services to better meet the needs of people living alone with dementia.

The findings will inform the Australian, NSW and local Governments, policy makers and service providers about people with dementia who live alone. Recommendations were provided to better support this cohort. It will also be of value to people living alone with dementia and their families and friends. People living alone with dementia are particularly vulnerable and it is critical that aged, community and health services are well equipped to support them to maintain their independence in their own home for as long as is possible and avoid premature entry to residential aged care.

Results

This research has improved the understanding of the needs of people living alone with dementia. The model of good practice identified, if implemented by community-based providers, will enhance the quality of support delivered to people living alone with dementia.

Some of the key findings and practice recommendations identified include:

- the value of social participation and active engagement of this cohort.
- the importance of planning ahead to protect them from abuse and ensure their wishes are respected.
- the value of nutrition, hygiene and medication management to ensure ongoing well-being.

Strategies identified will be critical in improving the mind and lifestyle of the estimated 65,000 people living alone with dementia.

One of the key challenges in dementia service delivery is for people to have an acceptance of a dementia diagnosis and a readiness to seek help and support. Doing this can substantially improve a person's lifestyle and independence through accessing psycho-educational services, post-diagnosis support, dementia specific programs and home-based help.

This project has helped raise awareness of the issue of people living alone with dementia – it is now more prominent in the policy and service agenda now as a result. This includes having a policy position for Alzheimer's Australia on the cohort and giving a focal point to advocacy efforts across the Federation.