

Survey shows Australians worry about brain health

June 1 2010

The majority of Australians (58%) are worried about their brain health and the threat of age-related degenerative brain disease, according to a new survey.

The national survey was commissioned by leading medical research institute Neuroscience Research Australia and polled 1000 Australians aged 18 to over 75.

"More and more Australians are witnessing the debilitating effects of brain diseases like dementia," said Professor Peter Schofield, Executive Director of Neuroscience Research Australia.

"In our survey, almost 70% of people said they knew someone affected by a brain disease, injury or illness. Despite this public concern, the recent 2010-11 budget was silent on funding research that will ameliorate and even prevent these diseases."

Of those surveyed, older [baby boomers](#) were the most anxious, with almost 70% worried about their [brain health](#). More than half said they would be willing to put off retirement to keep their mind active and healthy. More than half of [young adults](#) surveyed also fear dementia, Alzheimer's or Parkinson's disease, either for themselves or someone close to them.

"These terrible illnesses rob people of more years of healthy living than cancer and heart disease combined," says Professor Schofield. "It's not

surprising there's fear in the community."

Brain and nerve disorders account for 19.1% of total years lost to disability, compared with just 6.5% for cancer and 7.7% for cardiovascular disease (AIHW, 2007).

The Australian population 65+ is projected to double by mid century, and those 85+ is projected to quadruple (AU Govt, 2010). The number of dementia sufferers is projected to increase over four-fold (Access Economics, 2009). Despite the growing prevalence, 55% said they would not feel comfortable telling others if they had a [brain disease](#) or injury.

"Brain diseases can take away so much more than other illnesses," said Professor Schofield. "They affect your personality and reduce your dignity."

This tidal wave of ailing boomers means dementia will become the country's top health expense by 2062, increasing from \$3.8 billion to \$83 billion p.a. (Access Economics, 2009). "People can live for many years with brain diseases like dementia, Alzheimer's and Parkinson's disease and can require a great deal of care," said Professor Schofield.

Over 60% of people surveyed were concerned about this looming cost to taxpayers. Almost 75% of respondents said Australia should spend more on research into diseases of the brain and nervous system.

"The 2010-11 budget supports increased aged care, but without research leading to effective treatments, this capacity will rapidly be swamped by the imminent rise in degenerative brain diseases," said Professor Schofield. "Australians are aware that we can't reduce the burden of disease without research."

Provided by Research Australia

Citation: Survey shows Australians worry about brain health (2010, June 1) retrieved 7 May 2024 from <https://medicalxpress.com/news/2010-06-survey-australians-brain-health.html>

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