

# Understanding the challenges of air travel and dementia

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Dr Maria O'Reilly, QUT Research Fellow with the Dementia Collaborative Research Centre: Carers and Consumers (DCRC:CC)

As the number of people with dementia grows it's increasingly critical to understand its impact and how to manage it in a range of circumstances including air travel where no guidelines currently exist for airlines or airports.

Dr Maria O'Reilly, QUT Research Fellow with the Dementia Collaborative Research Centre: Carers and Consumers (DCRC:CC) has launched two surveys to 'start the conversation' by seeking input from people with [dementia](#), carers, pilots, [flight attendants](#) and other airline

and airport staff on their experiences.

"We know confusion can occur under high altitude conditions and that increases the risk of a person with dementia experiencing [medical complications](#) like disorientation and agitation," Dr O'Reilly said.

"Air travel is so accessible these days and having dementia should not automatically stop an individual with dementia from flying but we need to explore the implications of flying for people with dementia, their companions, other passengers and airline and airport staff.

"The surveys, being conducted on behalf of the DCRC:CC is designed to provide ideas and strategies towards the creation of guidelines for airlines and airports and appropriate advice for travellers with dementia and their companions, as well as training for staff on how to recognise and deal with a situation involving a passenger with dementia.

"The surveys will help us understand what the barriers are to [air travel](#) for people with dementia. Guidelines exist for other impairments and dementia is not going to become less of an issue any time soon.

"There are two surveys - one for people with dementia and carers and the other for airline and airport staff. They have been put together with assistance from a panel of experts including a pilot, a former flight attendant and someone with dementia who is a seasoned traveller."

According to Alzheimer's Australia there are now more 342,800 Australians living with dementia, a figure that will almost triple by 2050 without a medical breakthrough.

Of these, approximately 25,100 have Younger Onset Dementia (a diagnosis of dementia under the age of 65), while around 1.2 million people are involved in the care of a person with dementia

Dr O'Reilly said the surveys take only 10-20 minutes to complete and are anonymous although participants also have the option to volunteer to be contacted by the research team for an interview.

**More information:** People with dementia and their carers can access the survey on flying at [survey.qut.edu.au/f/184431/10f5/](https://survey.qut.edu.au/f/184431/10f5/)

Survey for airline staff can be completed at [survey.qut.edu.au/f/184314/1054/](https://survey.qut.edu.au/f/184314/1054/)

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