

Study finds greater public awareness still needed about dementia

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Common beliefs and misconceptions in the community about dementia are still proving obstacles to treatment despite a rise in public awareness campaigns, an Australian study has found.

Researchers from Flinders University in South Australia pooled the results of 32 [dementia](#) surveys from around the world published between 2012 and 2017 and found that public awareness of the causes of dementia has not changed.

Almost half of the total 36,519 respondents had the common misconception that dementia was a normal part of ageing and was not preventable. The importance of formal [educational attainment](#) and management of cardiovascular were acknowledged by less than half of respondents even though regular exercise has been proven as the single most powerful influencer of brain health.

The public also tended to endorse poorly supported risk reduction strategies such as taking vitamin supplements, ahead of more effective but time consuming and energetic strategies, such as exercise regimes.

"We were surprised to find that dementia literacy is still so poor, given how much effort has been put into improving understanding," said lead researcher Monica Cations.

"The view that dementia is a normal part of ageing with few treatment options is a demonstrated barrier to both preventive health behaviours and to help-seeking and diagnosis in the event that symptoms emerge."

The 32 surveys were sourced from Europe (12), the United States (11), Asia (7) and Australia (2).

The findings and associated problems are outlined in the paper, "What does the general public understand about prevention and treatment of dementia? A [systematic review](#) of population-based surveys," which has been published by *PLoS ONE*

There are about 47 million people living with dementia worldwide.

While research has not yet discovered a cure, there is accumulating evidence about the potential to prevent approximately one third of cases of dementia with management of risk factors such as poor educational attainment, hypertension, and depression.

The recently adopted World Health Organization (WHO) Global Action Plan on Dementia urges all countries to implement campaigns to raise awareness about dementia. The plan includes a global target that all member countries will have at least one [public awareness](#) campaign on dementia by 2025.

The study follows on from a systematic review of papers to mid-2014, published by Cahill and colleagues in 2015, which had similar results to the current study.

More information: Monica Cations et al. What does the general public understand about prevention and treatment of dementia? A systematic review of population-based surveys, *PLOS ONE* (2018). [DOI: 10.1371/journal.pone.0196085](#)

Provided by The Lead

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