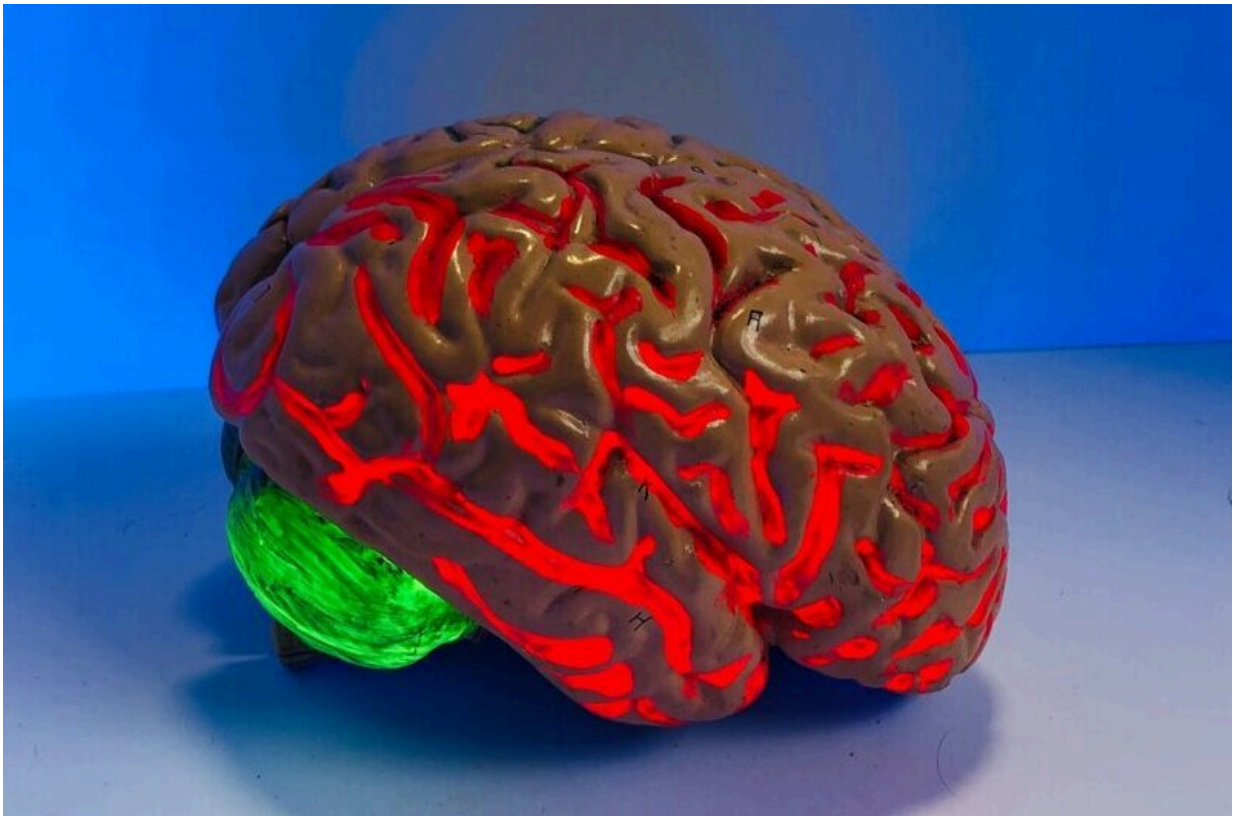


# Dementia is now the leading cause of disease burden for older Aussies

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Credit: Unsplash/CC0 Public Domain

Dementia has overtaken coronary heart disease as the leading cause of disease burden among Australians aged 65 and over.

The latest update to the Australian Institute of Health and Welfare's (AIHW) compendium report [Dementia in Australia](#) shows that [dementia](#) was responsible for almost 230,000 years of healthy life lost among people aged 65 and over in 2022, a 61% increase since 2011.

"Dementia is an umbrella term for a group of conditions that gradually impair [brain function](#) that may impact memory, speech, cognition (thought), personality, behavior. It is an increasing cause of disease burden in Australia, largely due to our aging population but also from declines in burden from other leading causes, such as [coronary heart disease](#)," said AIHW spokesperson Melanie Dunford.

"Dementia was responsible for 4.4% of Australia's disease burden in 2022, which includes both the impact of living with the condition (the non-fatal burden of disease) and dying prematurely (fatal burden), and was the 2nd leading cause of death in Australia in 2020, accounting for 9.6% of all deaths."

In 2022, 401,300 Australians were estimated to be living with dementia. This number increased by 4% from the year prior and is expected to more than double to 849,300 in 2058.

Today's report includes information on the behaviors and psychological symptoms of dementia (BPSD). BPSD refers to a range of non-cognitive symptoms that are common among people living with dementia, including agitation, aggression, insomnia and anxiety.

"While the deterioration of memory, language and cognition are hallmarks of dementia, the majority of people with dementia will also experience at least one type of BPSD as their dementia progresses," Ms. Dunford said.

"BPSD can have a significant impact on people with dementia,

caregivers and family, and has been associated with early admission to residential care, increased hospitalization, distress for caregivers and reduced functional ability for the person with dementia."

Among those referred to BPSD support services delivered by Dementia Support Australia between July 2021 and June 2022, agitation was the most recorded primary behavior, accounting for almost 35% of referrals. This was followed by physical aggression (25%), verbal aggression (11%) and anxiety (6.4%).

While there are no current prevalence estimates for BPSD in Australia, this report presents information on the prevalence of select symptoms using available data. Further work is required to understand the full impact and cause(s) of BPSD.

## What is 'burden of disease?'

Every year in Australia, millions of years of healthy life are lost because of injury, illness or [premature deaths](#). This loss of healthy life is called the "burden of disease." Burden of [disease](#) is the gold standard approach for measuring the impact of illness, injury and death, facilitating consistent measures for monitoring [population health](#) and generating evidence to inform [health policy](#) and service planning.

Provided by Australian Institute of Health and Welfare (AIHW)

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