

More than half of aged care residents are on antidepressants, finds Australian study

March 12 2024



Credit: Unsplash/CC0 Public Domain

A new study by the Registry of Senior Australians (ROSA), based at SAHMRI, has found 6 out of 10 Australian aged care residents are taking antidepressant medication.

The study, [published](#) in the *Journal of American Medical Directors Association*, was led by University of South Australia Ph.D. candidate, Georgina Hughes, in collaboration with Professor Maria Inacio and Dr. Janet Sluggett.

It's Australia's first national study investigating the use of antidepressants among older people living in residential aged care homes across the country, analyzing the de-identified data of 779,659 residents from 3,371 aged care homes between 2006 and 2019.

"We found antidepressants were used by 46.1% of residents in 2006 and this increased to 58.5% of residents in 2019," Hughes said.

"Nearly 6 in every 10 residents of aged care homes are using an antidepressant, which is much higher than use in the general older population."

Several factors are contributing to this rise, including a growing focus on [mental health](#), spurred by the Royal Commission into Aged Care Quality and Safety. While antidepressants can have positive effects, they can also cause side effects such as nausea, restlessness and sedation, which can lead to falls and fractures.

"Transitioning to living in an aged care home often has a big impact on a person's life. Although antidepressants can have beneficial effects for some people, it's important they are used for the right reasons and the right amount of time," Hughes said.

"It's really important that people living in aged care homes are accessing non-drug treatments that benefit their overall mental health and well-being and not solely relying on antidepressants."

Researchers can't deduce whether antidepressants are being overused,

but the high use in aged care homes compared to the general population suggests a need for deeper investigation.

ROSA is now conducting further studies to better understand the duration of antidepressant use and safety among older Australians living in aged care homes.

"This study, along with other ROSA research, highlights a pressing need to improve the delivery of mental health care in aged care homes, including the safe and appropriate use of antidepressant medicines," Hughes said.

"It's also important to note that residents with a GP referral are able to access a free medicines review from a pharmacist."

ROSA is encouraging the need for open discussions between residents, their families and health care providers to ensure the safe and effective use of antidepressants among [older people](#) living in aged care homes.

More information: Georgina A. Hughes et al, National Trends in Antidepressant Use in Australian Residential Aged Care Facilities (2006–2019), *Journal of the American Medical Directors Association* (2024). [DOI: 10.1016/j.jamda.2024.01.026](https://doi.org/10.1016/j.jamda.2024.01.026)

Provided by South Australian Health and Medical Research Institute

Citation: More than half of aged care residents are on antidepressants, finds Australian study (2024, March 12) retrieved 28 April 2024 from <https://medicalxpress.com/news/2024-03-aged-residents-antidepressants-australian.html>

This document is subject to copyright. Apart from any fair dealing for the purpose of private study or research, no part may be reproduced without the written permission. The content is provided for information purposes only.