

Aged Care Diversity Framework

Resource Sheet 9 People Living with Cognitive Impairment & Dementia

People within this diverse group include people with dementia, intellectual disability and acquired brain injury. In 2021, there were approximately 472,000 Australians living with dementia. About 10% of people aged over 65 and 30% of those aged over 85 live with dementia. Almost 65% are women. Alzheimer's Disease accounts for about 70% with dementia. The most common other forms of dementia include vascular dementia and dementia with Lewy bodies.

It is estimated that up to 700,000 Australians live with an acquired brain injury (ABI) resulting from brain damage after birth. This can be the result of accidents, trauma, stroke, infections and alcohol and other drug abuse. Approximately 75% are men and 25% are aged over 65.

The Australian Institute of Health and Welfare estimates that 328,000 people live with an intellectual disability with 178,000 requiring daily assistance. Older adults with intellectual disability are much less likely to have adult children as carers. Many adults with intellectual disability have older parent carers who may be resistant to engagement with disability support and aged care services.

Cognitive impairment and dementia affects older people in different ways and to varying extents. People with dementia commonly experience confusion, anxiety, depression and issues with problem solving. People with ABI can exhibit behaviours of concern and emotional unpredictability, be easily overwhelmed and have multiple disabilities.

People living with intellectual disability have higher rates of brittle bones, cancer, heart disease and vision and hearing loss. People with cognitive impairment may be prone to false ideas and fixations. Each of these factors can lead to challenges in accessing and engaging with the aged care system.

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General Strategies to address access and engagement challenges

- Build supportive partnerships with carers and family members.
- Establish whether and to what extent the older person can be involved in decision-making. Know which decisions the person can make on their own, which decisions require support and how they can participate with others in making the final decision.
- Avoid overwhelming the person with information and stimuli. Watch vigilantly for signs of confusion and agitation.
- Focus on goals that reduce social isolation, build and support routine, support carers and equip the person with coping skills to live well with cognitive impairment and dementia.
- Establish the right physical environment, one that is generally uncluttered with recognisable furniture and fittings and familiar objects in clear view.
- Split the activities of daily living into tasks that the person can do for themselves, tasks that need to be done by support staff and tasks that they can do together.
- Identify and implement enabling products and assistive technology like prompts and reminders, sensory aids, safety immobilisers, monitoring systems and domestic aids.

For further information,
see **Sheet 17: Resources**
– **Resource Nos. 4, 7, 23**