

# SPECIFIC POPULATIONS:



Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people  
in Australia

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# Groups with specific social and cultural needs in Australia

- Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Peoples
- Migrants
- People with younger onset dementia
- People with pre-existing intellectual disabilities
- People who identify as non-heterosexual



Base: BUSHMAN (2003) BY 12-93

# Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Peoples

- Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Peoples comprise 2.5% of total population, with higher representation in regional and remote areas
  - Poor social determinants contribute to:
    - ▣ Lower life expectancy - 17 years lower than non-Indigenous
    - ▣ High rates of chronic diseases in >55 years cohort, including diabetes (32%), hypertension (42%)
- Smith et al. 2008; 2009
- Strengths – older people are integral to social fabric as they hold and transfer knowledge and wisdom

# Perceptions of dementia

- Cultural norms
- Spiritual beliefs

*“Dementia is a sick spirit, a lost spirit looking for help – we call this wawu warra – a sick spirit”*

Eric Deeral, in Arabena, 2007

- Language to describe dementia



# Barriers to diagnosis and care

- ▣ Lower levels of awareness of the bio-medical definition of dementia – different metaphysical belief systems
- ▣ Lack of access to specialists in urban, remote and regional areas
- ▣ Poor cultural safety of health services
- ▣ No career pathways for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander dementia workers or behavioural specialists
- ▣ Limited research
- ▣ Culturally inappropriate assessment tools
  - educational differences
  - oral language
  - different concepts of time and space



# Prevalence

Based on the finding of the KICA study  
prevalence in remote dwelling communities:

- ▣ 12.4% in people >45 years
- ▣ 26.8% in those > 65 years

Smith et al., 2008

- ▣ Revised estimate: prevalence 4 times higher than non-Indigenous rates

# Impact of dementia in Aboriginal communities

- Breakdown in kinship obligations eg avoidance relationships
- Loss of language - dialects
- Grief associated with loss of attachment to land, physically and spiritually
- Transgression of cultural rituals – men's and women's business, rituals relating to death
- Perceptions and beliefs about changes in health – for example sorcery

# Indigenous Dementia Forum 2006

- Workshop in November 2006
  - ▣ Recognised a need for better evidence and better targeting of resources
- 7 Recommendations, including
  - ▣ Establishment of advisory group for on-going consultation and advice (NATSIDAG)
  - ▣ Appointment of National Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Liaison Officer
- 6 Key Action Points

# Key areas for action

- Community awareness and prevention education
- Access to care and support
- Research – prevalence, risks, types
- Diagnosis, referral and treatment – culturally appropriate
- Training for Indigenous careworkers and training for non-Indigenous workforce including cultural safety
- Partnerships and collaborations

Alzheimer's Australia, 2006

# Studies of needs and preferences

- Aboriginal families provide care as part of kinship obligation
- Elders prefer to be cared for at home
- Lack of transport
- Lack of knowledge of services
- Lack of culturally appropriate services

Alt Beatty Consulting, 2008

Indigenous Dementia Services Study, 2009

# Growing Old Well Study 2008-11

## Aims:

- Establish the prevalence of dementia in a sample of people from urban- dwelling Aboriginal communities in New South Wales
- Identify protective and risk factors across the life cycle that affect physical health in mid-life and lead to dementia in later life

Headed by Professor Tony Broe  
Neuroscience Australia, University of New South Wales

# Steps towards achieving culturally appropriate dementia support

- Awareness raising – community-based
- Early screening and assessment – KICA
- Access to long holistic long term care – eg Looma in Western Australia
- Training for Indigenous and non-Indigenous health care personnel – including cultural awareness
- Collaborative partnerships – NATSIDAG and Alzheimer's Australia

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