

# Statewide Dementia Clinical Network

Health Professionals who support people living with dementia (in alphabetical order)



Health Professional	Description	Role in care of people with dementia
<b>Dieticians and Nutritionists</b>	<p>Dieticians are health professionals who work with people with medical conditions which would benefit from nutritional intervention, including diabetes, heart disease, renal disease, gastrointestinal disease, malnutrition and food allergy. They develop nutritional care plans to meet the person's particular requirements. They may also advise groups on nutrition-related matters.</p> <p>Nutritionists are health professionals who have expertise in a range of nutrition areas such as community health and public health nutrition. They do not provide individual dietary counselling, group therapy or medical nutrition therapy.</p>	<p>People with dementia may have difficulty chewing or swallowing food. The dietician may work with speech pathologists and nurses to arrange a suitable diet which may include appropriate finger foods as required. People with dementia may lose weight and a dietician may advise on nutritional supplements.</p>
<b>Diversional Therapists / Recreational Officers</b>	<p>Diversional therapists / recreation officers work with people to optimise life experiences. They aim to enable maximum participation in leisure involvement to suit individual preferences. They may organize, coordinate and support local recreational or sporting events, community functions, hobby classes, public displays and cultural activities. They may develop and administer recreation policies, resources, recruitment, training and supervision of recreation leaders.</p>	<p>Diversional therapists and recreation officers are often employed in residential aged care facilities and aged care wards to plan and run activity programs. Some community programs have recreational officers to provide support for socially isolated people. They are also involved in working with individual residents / clients to tailor activities in keeping with the person's interests, including music, craft and reading. In the community they may assist clients in being involved in suitable programs eg attending a day respite centre.</p>
<b>General practitioner</b>	<p>A general practitioner (GP) or family doctor provides primary care for a wide range of medical conditions for all age groups. The GP has a central role in coordinating care and in understanding the family and social background.</p>	<p>The GP may refer to a specialist for diagnosis and ongoing management of dementia. The GP will continue to manage other medical problems.</p>

<b>Geriatrician</b>	<p>A physician (medical doctor) who specialises in the diagnosis and management of illness and conditions that occur in older people (including frailty, dementia, rehabilitation, falls etc).</p> <p>They work in acute hospitals, memory clinics, in private practice, community clinics and provide consultations in residential care.*</p>	<p>Many geriatricians have expertise in the diagnosis of the different types of dementia, use of medications, and in the care of patients through the various stages of dementia.</p>
<b>Gerontologist</b>	<p>A scientist who studies the changes in the mind and body that accompany ageing and the social consequences of ageing. This may include sociologists, psychologists, demographers, health professionals engaged in research and other academic or university based researchers.</p>	
<b>Neurologist</b>	<p>A physician (medical doctor) who specializes in diagnosis and management of diseases of the nervous system (eg strokes, epilepsy, movement disorders, dementia etc).*</p>	<p>Neurologists have expertise in the diagnosis of the different types of dementia, and the use of medications</p>
<b>Occupational Therapists (OT)</b>	<p>Health professionals who assess the functional ability of clients to care for themselves. This may include assessment of activities of daily living and the use of assistive equipment. They work with clients and their carers to maximize independence and safety in both the home and community.</p>	<p>OT's are involved in cognitive testing, assessment of risks/safety issues, task breakdown, advice about equipment and modifications of environments to maintain independence. Some are qualified to perform driving assessments.</p>
<b>Psychiatrist</b>	<p>A specialist medical doctor who specialises in the diagnosis and management of mental health or psychiatric illnesses or conditions.*</p>	<p>Some psychiatrists have expertise in the diagnosis of the different types of dementia, and the use of medications.</p>
<b>Psycho geriatrician</b>	<p>A specialist medical doctor who specializes in the diagnosis and management of mental health problems or psychiatric (mental health) disorders occurring in older people.*</p>	<p>Psycho geriatricians have expertise in the diagnosis of the different types of dementia, and the use of medications. They have a particular interest in the management of behaviour problems in dementia, and also in other mental health conditions, including depression.</p>
<b>Psychologist</b>	<p>A health professional who is qualified in psychology and assesses people with cognitive, behavioural or emotional symptoms.</p> <p>This includes neuropsychologists, clinical, educational, behavioural and organisational psychologists.</p>	<p>Neuro psychologists are skilled in the complex assessment of cognition, and may be involved in detailed testing during the diagnosis of dementia, particularly of the atypical dementias.</p> <p>Behavioural or clinical psychologists may work with nurses and other staff in the care of people with significant behavioural problems.</p>
<b>Physiotherapist</b>	<p>A health professional who provides services to</p>	<p>Physiotherapists may perform gait</p>

	clients to develop, maintain and restore maximum movement and functional ability throughout life. They work with clients who are affected by ageing, injury, illness or environmental factors.	analysis and advise on exercise programs and assistive equipment for people with dementia who have a history of, or are at risk of falls, or whose mobility is impaired.
<b>Registered Nurse</b>	Registered nurses assess, plan, provide and evaluate preventative, curative and rehabilitative care for patients in a wide variety of settings, including public and private hospitals, nursing homes, the community and home-based services, and in industry.	Registered nurses are responsible for the care of residents in residential aged care facilities and will plan and co-ordinate the care given by other staff. Community health nurses apply nursing skills and knowledge in the assessment and treatment of clients in order to promote, maintain, and improve their health, functional ability and quality of life. This may include dementia clinical nurse consultants, nurse practitioners and dementia nurse advisors, who have additional training in the ongoing care of people with dementia.
<b>Social Worker</b>	A health professional who provides support to clients, families and carers, especially during times of stress and change, including grief, adjustment to illness, and personal and relationship stress arising from changed health status. They have skills in psychosocial assessment and counseling. They can assist with access to community and government resources and services resources.	Social workers can be accessed through community health services and are also employed by public hospitals. They will help with the steps required for residential aged care placement, accessing community services and provide counseling for the client and carers.
<b>Speech Pathologist</b>	A health professional who diagnoses, treats and manages people of all ages with communication disorders, including speech, language, voice, fluency and literacy difficulties, or people who have physical problems with eating or swallowing.	Speech Pathologists provide support and strategies for people in the earlier stages of dementia experiencing communication changes and their carers. Eating and swallowing problems may occur in the later stages of dementia and a speech pathologist may provide advice on the safest way to provide food and fluids. They may also be involved in the diagnosis of some types of dementia which affect language.

**Note the Following:**

*	These doctors with specialist training work in hospitals or require referral from a general practitioner for outpatient or clinic consultations.
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**The Term ‘Health Care Professional/ Professionals’:**

<b>Health Professional</b>	The term “health professional” implies a tertiary qualification from a university or other institution and recognition by a health practitioner registration board (eg, Australian Health Practitioner Regulation Agency, Occupational Therapy Board, Speech Pathologists, etc).
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