

Developing Best Practice for Physical Activity & Exercise Programs for People Living with Dementia

AAG/ACS Regional Conference

5th March 2015

Batemans Bay

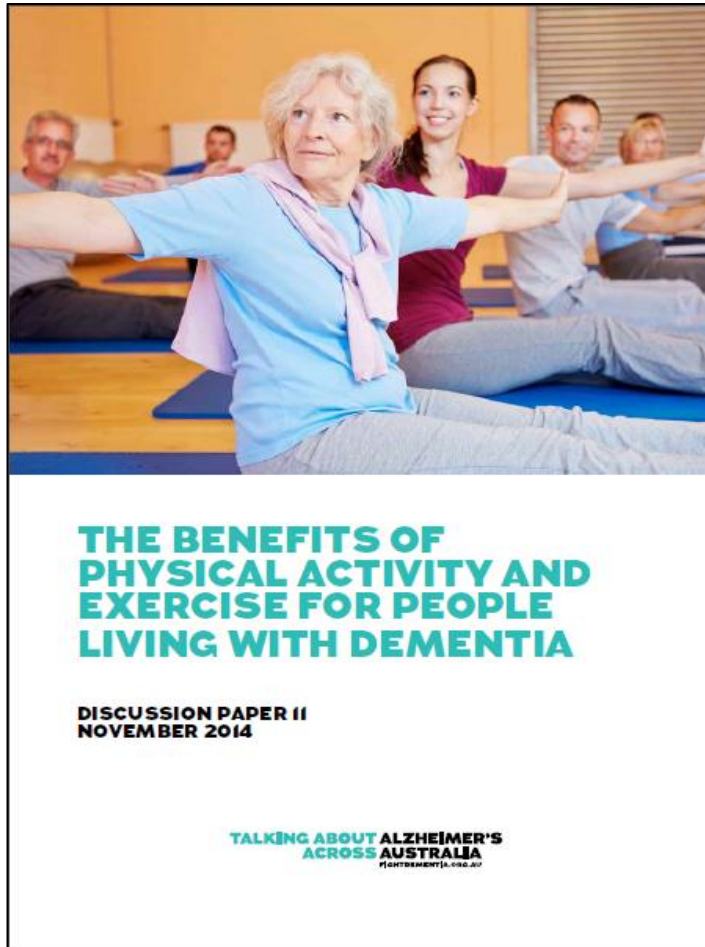
Kylie Miskovski

Senior Research & Policy Officer

Alzheimer's Australia NSW



ALZHEIMER'S AUSTRALIA NSW DISCUSSION PAPER 11



PHYSICAL ACTIVITY & EXERCISE

- **Physical activity:** any movement that works the muscles and expends energy; includes incidental movement and activities such as household chores and gardening
- **Exercise:** planned, structured and repetitive physical activity with the goal of improving or maintaining physical fitness

THE NEED FOR THIS WORK

- Increasing evidence about physical activity reducing the risk of dementia BUT not much about the benefits for people who are living with dementia
- People with dementia are excluded from exercise programs and physical activities in community and residential aged care
- Increasing emphasis on 'wellness' approaches

RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

1. Literature review
2. Interviews with people living with dementia and family carers about the benefits of exercise and physical activity
 - 9 RACF residents with dementia
 - 5 people with dementia living at home
 - 8 carers of people with dementia
3. Identification of examples of good practice in programs and services that provide opportunities for people with dementia to participate in exercise

EXISTING RESEARCH – CHALLENGES & LIMITATIONS

- Recruitment and retention of people with dementia in research programs and randomised controlled trials is difficult
- Difficulties of attributing causation to improvements in cognitive, clinical indicators or behavioural changes to an exercise regime
- People with dementia historically excluded from research trials however increasing number of studies examining effects of exercise on people with dementia

BENEFITS OF PHYSICAL ACTIVITY AND EXERCISE

For everyone:

- More energy
- Better sleep quality
- Relaxation and stress relief
- Improved concentration
- Health weight
- Healthy blood pressure
- Good for bones, muscles and joints
- Reduces risk of heart disease, stroke and some cancers
- Aids in pain management
- Reduce risk of falls

BENEFITS OF PHYSICAL ACTIVITY AND EXERCISE

Additional benefits for people with dementia

- Assist in maintaining basic activities of daily living such as bathing, dressing and functional mobility. And in some instrumental activities of daily living including housework
- Slow down functional decline
- Promote normal day-night routine
- Address unmet needs and associated behaviours e.g. ‘wandering’, agitation etc.

PEOPLE WITH DEMENTIA

- Feel better
- Feel more alert
- Feel happier
- Feel socially engaged



Participants identified physical, cognitive, emotional, and social benefits from physical activity.

“I feel you’re more alive after exercise”

(Ron, 93 years old)

“I think it’s good for us. It keeps you going. You’re motivated, you’re keen...I feel good after the exercise class.”

(Harriet, 89 years old)

“My mind feels better because the exercise stimulates the mind. And I’m happier in myself because I’ve done something rather than just sit around. Because of my memory the feeling is short-term but I feel better anyway.”

(Mal, mid-80s)

“I do tai chi. I didn’t really know what it was. I thought it was like judo but then with all the old ladies here I thought ‘no, it can’t be judo!’ So I went for the first time and I really enjoyed it, all the different exercises for all the muscles in your body and it’s a great thing and I like it. Your whole system works better and you get more blood to your brain so it’s very positive.”

(Derek, 77 years old)

“I would like to be doing some exercise. But there’s no mention of exercise down here (DSU), not like upstairs (where) there was the opportunity for exercise, fairly simple body exercises, all very gentle. I think it does help to keep you in better shape, but there’s not the encouragement down here.” (Beverley, in her 90s)

FLOW-ON BENEFITS

For family carers and care staff

- Reduces behavioural symptoms as a result of unmet need e.g. aggression, agitation, wandering, depression
- Reduces carer stress

For Governments

- Delay entry to residential care?
- Reduce hospitalisation
- Keeping people with dementia physically well is cost-saving

BARRIERS & LIMITATIONS

Individual

- Physical disabilities or limitations
- Lack of confidence following diagnosis of dementia
- Physically inactive lifestyle

Cultural

- Stigma causing exclusion
- A risk averse culture in aged care

Structural

- Inappropriately designed facilities
- Environments and communities that are not dementia friendly

EXAMPLES OF GOOD PRACTICE

- **Younger Onset Dementia Gym Program**
Community Gateway
- **Centre for Healthy Ageing**
UnitingCare Ageing
- **Active Body Active Brain**
ACH Group and Heart Foundation Walking
- People with dementia and carers e.g. Fiona and Jane
“I notice a really positive benefit. I could see straight away that mum was more refreshed and more alive after the exercise. Her ability to focus is better, there is some sort of firing going on in the brain, and I think that is not coincidental.”

DEVELOPING THE EVIDENCE BASE

- The need to evaluate programs to develop best practice
- Recommendation: The Australian Government fund a series of pilot programs/demonstration models of exercise programs in residential aged care and community aged care for people with dementia
- Recommendation: The Australian Government fund the development of toolkits for aged care service providers – supported by knowledge translation activities which provide guidance on implementation

PRACTICE RECOMMENDATIONS

Aged care

- Aged care providers introduce exercise programs for people with dementia e.g. form partnerships with private gyms
- Residential aged care enable mobility and freedom of movement

Other

- Local councils support dementia-friendly community activities
- Gyms provide education for their staff about dementia

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

- Anglican Retirement Villages (ARV) for sponsoring the paper



- People with dementia and their carers who participated in interviews
- Service providers who shared their wisdom

THANK YOU

kylie.miskovski@alzheimers.org.au

(02) 8875 4641

<https://nsw.fightdementia.org.au/nsw/research-and-publications/research>

