$18 million of new funds to support innovative dementia research

Research to improve our understanding of dementia and how to better treat and prevent it has received an $18 million boost following the announcement of new National Health and Medical Research Council (NHMRC) grants today.

The grants cover a range of innovative research projects, from genetic studies of twins, to studying the effects of an intergenerational activity program.

CEO Professor Warwick Anderson acknowledged the importance of these grants and their potential to make real progress in understanding dementia. He added that they will also complement other NHMRC-supported dementia research work already underway.

“These grants, coupled with the Australian Government’s recent $200 million boost for dementia research, represent a very significant commitment to dementia research. These efforts taken as a whole reflect the enormity of the challenge ahead,” Professor Anderson said.

“Although the most common form of dementia, Alzheimer’s disease, was first described in 1906, our understanding of dementia and our diagnostic tools are still in their infancy,” he said.

“There is still much to learn, but I am confident that Australian researchers will make significant headway in understanding how we can prevent, treat and manage this disease.”

The Australian Institute of Health and Welfare estimates that dementia affects 10% of people over the age of 65, and 30% of people over the age of 85, with 900,000 Australians expected to be living with dementia by 2050.

Because of this, dementia was recognised as the ninth National Health Priority Area (NHPA) in 2012.

“The government’s NHPAs are also strongly supported research areas for NHMRC,” Professor Anderson affirmed. “In this current round of funding, around $308 million is going towards research focused on the NHPAs.”
The grants were part of a $539.8 million announcement made today by Prime Minister Tony Abbott and Minister for Health Peter Dutton, for 773 grants across a broad range of diseases and health conditions.

**Research highlights**

**Associate Professor Michael Valenzuela, University of Sydney, Project Grant ($715,764)**

A progressive loss in the ability to think (cognition) is a key feature of dementia. Associate Professor Valenzuela and his team are conducting a clinical trial to determine whether intensive computerised training can stop the progress of cognitive decline and the onset of dementia.

**Dr Lee-Fay Low, University of New South Wales, Career Development Fellowship ($411,768)**

Dr Low will use her fellowship to develop and test unique dementia interventions designed to improve quality of life for people with dementia and their carers. These include a dance program to improve physical functioning and decrease agitation, and an intergenerational program that brings together pre-schoolers with aged care residents with dementia. It is hoped that the program will offer those residents emotional benefits and give them a sense of community.

**Professor Perminder Sachdev, University of New South Wales, Project Grant ($625,404)**

‘Plaques’ on the brain are one of the hallmark indicators of Alzheimer’s disease, but it is still not fully understood how they grow or how they are linked to cognitive decline. Professor Sachdev and his team will conduct the world’s first study using PET scans of 100 sets of twins aged 65+ to study the relationship between plaques and cognitive function, and to shed light on how genes and environments contribute to the development of the plaques.

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**Further information**

More information about the grants announced today can be found on the NHMRC website under [Outcomes of funding rounds](https://www.nhmrc.gov.au).