

POSITION STATEMENT - SUMMARY

HEARING HEALTH AND DEMENTIA

JUNE 2020

Dementia is an overall term for several diseases that describes a group of symptoms associated with a decline in a person's memory or other thinking skills. Ageing is the strongest known risk factor for dementia. According to Dementia Australia (2020) there are more than 459,000 Australians presently living with dementia and an estimated 1.6 million Australians involved in their care. Furthermore, without a medical breakthrough, the number of people living with this condition is expected to increase to 589,807 in 2028 and to 1,076,129 by 2058.

Recent studies have identified an association between age-related hearing loss and cognitive decline and/or dementia. In a report published by Livingston et al (2017), mid-life hearing loss was named as the greatest single modifiable risk factor to reduce the risk of dementia. Despite this, however, more research is required to provide sufficient evidence for either hearing loss causing dementia, or hearing interventions delaying cognitive decline and/or dementia. The potential association of untreated hearing loss to cognitive decline/dementia cannot be used by audiologists to encourage the sale and fitting of hearing aids or other amplification devices.

Audiologists have an important professional role in the context of hearing loss and dementia, including providing clinical services to assist in the timely identification and management of hearing loss in older people; and audiologic treatment to individuals with dementia that optimises communication and social engagement throughout the course of the disease.

Audiology Australia encourages hearing health practitioners to:

- be aware of, and review the linkage between, cognitive decline/dementia and hearing health;
- refrain from using the potential association of untreated hearing loss to cognitive decline/dementia to encourage the sale and fitting of hearing aids or other amplification devices; and
- consider the importance of the hearing healthcare profession in assisting in the timely identification and management of hearing loss in older people.