Dementia is the word used to describe the symptoms of illnesses that affect the brain. It is not one specific disease. Common dementias are Alzheimer’s disease and cardio-vascular dementia.

Dementia causes a progressive decline in a person’s functioning and affects a person’s thinking, behaviour and ability to perform everyday tasks. It also affects their senses of sight, touch, taste, smell and hearing.

The risk of getting dementia increases with age, but it is not a normal part of ageing. Dementia can happen to anybody, but it is more common after the age of 65 years. Most older people do not get dementia.

Services are available in Victoria for people with dementia, and their families, carers and friends.

National Dementia Helpline
The National Dementia Helpline is an Australia-wide, confidential telephone information and support service.

The helpline is staffed by trained and experienced professionals and can help:

- people with dementia and their family and friends
- staff caring for someone with dementia
- anyone concerned about memory loss.

The helpline offers practical information and advice, and staff can tell you about the services provided by Alzheimer's Australia.

You can call the National Dementia Helpline on 1800 100 500 during business hours.

If you need an interpreter or advocate, the helpline can provide access and referral to an appropriate service. People who are deaf or have a hearing or speech impairment can phone the National Relay Service on 13 36 77.

Cognitive Dementia and Memory Service (CDAMS)
CDAMS is a specialist service that helps people with memory loss, or changes to their thinking, and partners, carers and friends who support them.

CDAMS provides:
• expert clinical diagnosis
• information on appropriate treatments
• education, support and information
• direction in planning for the future
• information on dealing with day-to-day issues
• links for people with dementia and their carers to other services and community supports.

A CDAMS assessment includes medical and allied health consultations and may include a visit to your home. Other specialist assessments may be conducted (for example, neuropsychology). CDAMS will discuss the outcome of these consultations and recommendations with you and, if you agree, with your carer and doctor.

If you or someone you are caring for are experiencing changes to your memory and thinking you can contact CDAMS for information and advice. You can ask your local doctor or community health centre for a referral to CDAMS or refer yourself directly.

Clinics are located in metropolitan Melbourne and regional Victoria.

Dementia Behaviour Management Advisory Service (DBMAS)
The DBMAS helps people support someone with dementia in situations when their behaviour is impacting on their care.

DBMAS can:
• assess the person with dementia
• provide clinical support, information and advice (face to face, over the telephone or via email)
• help with care planning and short-term case management.

Assessments are free of charge for people demonstrating behavioural and psychological symptoms of dementia, and DBMAS can make referrals to other support services.

Call the DBMAS 24-hour telephone helpline on 1800 699 799 or visit the DBMAS website.

Services that support people with dementia living at home
The Home and Community Care (HACC) Program supports people with dementia by providing:
• activities of daily living, such as cleaning and other household tasks
• respite
• social opportunities
• information and counselling.

To find out more about HACC services available to you, contact your local council.

Services for people caring for someone with dementia
The physical and emotional demands of caring for someone with dementia can be high. If you are caring for a person with dementia, you may also need support so you can look after yourself. It is easier to continue your care role if you take time out to recharge.

Organisations and groups can help and support you if you are caring for someone with dementia.

Dementia Australia
Dementia Australia offers counselling, information, education, training and referral services.

Information about dementia is available in community languages.
To find out more about Dementia Australia call 1300 100 500 or visit the Dementia Australia’s website.

Carers Victoria

Carers Victoria provides advice, counselling services, practical information and support to partners, carers and friends. They can help you arrange respite care and have information in many community languages.

Call (03) 9396 9500 or visit the Carers Victoria website.

Support groups for carers of people with dementia

There are formal and informal support groups and networks for people with dementia and for their partners, carers and friends. You might find you feel reassured by catching up with others and getting help from people who share similar experiences.

Carer support groups bring together partners, carers and friends of people with dementia, sometimes with a group facilitator. To find the location of your nearest support group, contact the National Dementia Helpline on 1800 100 500, between 9.00am and 5.00pm Monday to Friday.

Respite care and short-term stays

Taking a break for a day, a weekend or even a week or more is one way to recharge for your care role. You might want to go away for a holiday, or attend an event interstate. Or you might need to go to hospital for a short stay.

You can arrange respite services to take over your care duties while you are away from home. Services and programs can help you take time out so you can take care of yourself.

The Victorian Support for Carers Program provides respite services and support around the state. Contact your local Department of Health & Human Services.

The Commonwealth Home Support Program provides access to respite services. You can contact them through My Aged Care on 1800 200 422.

There are other ways you can find respite care options, including:

- Visiting the Respite Victoria website.
- Searching the Health Services Directory on this website.

Aged Care Assessment Service (ACAS)

For an older person to access Commonwealth-funded residential respite care, they must be assessed as eligible by an ACAS.

ACAS is called Aged Care Assessment Team (ACAT) in other states.

To arrange an assessment, call 1800 200 422 or visit the My Aged Care website.

Where to get help

- Your local doctor
- Your local council
- Your local community health centre
- National Dementia Helpline (Dementia Australia), call 1800 100 500
- Aged Care Assessment Services
- My Aged Care, call 1800 200 422
- Cognitive Dementia and Memory Service (CDAMS) clinics, call 1300 135 090
- Dementia Behaviour Management Advisory Service (DBMAS), call 1800 699 799
- Help for Victorians with dementia and their carers

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