

Aboriginal communities have world's highest dementia incidence

August 20 2015, by David Stacey



Research by The University of Western Australia's Centre for Health and Ageing has confirmed that the incidence of dementia in remote Aboriginal communities is the highest in the world, with head injuries and age the greatest contributing factors.

UWA researchers revisited a target group of Aboriginal people based in WA's remote Kimberley region, originally tested ten years ago, to review the clinical and socio-economic factors contributing to dementia, in the hope of improving detection rates and targeting preventative measures.

WA Centre for Health and Ageing Director and Chair of Geriatric Medicine, Professor Leon Flicker, said they found that each year 21 out

of every 1,000 Aboriginal Australians over the age of sixty develops dementia, a rate at least twice as high as the general Australian population.

"This is a world first study that has provided comprehensive clinical data on the cognitive health of a group of older Indigenous people, Professor Flicker said. "We were looking at the incidence, predictors and progress of cognitive impairment and dementia in Aboriginal Australians using culturally appropriate assessment tools.

"Dementia is placing strain on these Aboriginal communities," Professor Flicker said. "The greatest risk factors we found were head injuries, as were stroke, a low body mass index and high blood pressure.

"Head injuries can be explained in the main by the higher than average number of car and other accidents, and falls," he said.

Data was collected from 363 remote and rural Aboriginal Australians aged over 45 years living in the Kimberley, who were originally recruited between 2004 and 2006 and then reassessed between 2011 and 2013. Researchers found that 75 per cent of the original group who had already been living with dementia had died.

"By further exploring the contributing risk factors we are now looking to target [preventative measures](#) such as preventing [head injuries](#) and controlling strokes," Professor Flicker said.

"Further research is needed to intervene and help prevent the onset of [dementia](#) and improve long term health outcomes for Aboriginal Australians who live in remote areas," he said.

Provided by University of Western Australia

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