



COMMONWEALTH OF AUSTRALIA

PARLIAMENTARY DEBATES



**HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES**

**Federation Chamber**

**PRIVATE MEMBERS' BUSINESS**

**Dementia Awareness Week**

**SPEECH**

**Monday, 17 September 2012**

BY AUTHORITY OF THE HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES

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## SPEECH

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**Questioner**  
**Speaker** Georganas, Steve, MP

**Source** House  
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**Responder**  
**Question No.**

**Mr GEORGANAS** (Hindmarsh) (19:26): I first of all congratulate the member for Newcastle for bringing such an important motion to the House. Dementia is the greatest cause of disability in Australians aged 65 and over. It is very important that we recognise the significance of Dementia Awareness Week, which is 21 September to 28 September, in promoting and advocating the needs of those living with dementia, and let us not forget their families and their carers. I am very glad that tonight we are here to address this issue, which affects more people in my electorate than anywhere else in the country. You might ask why so. Access Economics recently published a report showing the electorate of Hindmarsh as having the highest rate of dementia in the nation. That is a huge concern. One in four people in my electorate are over the age of 65. This is a problem that will only get bigger, not just in my electorate but across Australia. But the problem at the moment in my electorate is a problem that needs immediate solutions.

The behavioural changes that take place can be very, very dramatic for people who have dementia. It can be very distressing for the person involved and very confronting for the family members who take care of them. Things like hoarding, repetitive behaviour and, unfortunately, aggression, can be really upsetting, and no-one wants to see their mum or their dad or their grandparents or other relatives in that state of distress. We know that more Australians than ever are being diagnosed with dementia and having to come to terms with the challenges that a diagnosis presents. It is great today, as I said, that we can take a few moments to focus on this issue and think about how we can best try and help the nation to cope with the prospect of 7,400 new cases every week. There is a lot of work being done currently on dementia. I would like to also acknowledge the members of my House of Representatives Standing Committee on Health and Ageing who are here: the deputy chair, the member for Swan, and the member for Shortland, Jill Hall. They have both been involved in the inquiry that we are currently conducting. There will be more said about that as the report comes out later in the year.

It does not matter whether you are 40, 50 or 70 years old. We all need to be aware of the possibility that one day we might get dementia or someone in our family might be affected. How will we cope? What services are available? How can we ensure that we have the very best medical knowledge to promote early diagnosis and effective management of dementia? These are all the things that we are currently looking into in the health and ageing committee. Since March this year, we have been conducting this inquiry into the early diagnosis and treatment of dementia. We are going to be looking at a number of things, but in particular at how early diagnosis can improve the quality of life and assist people with dementia to remain independent for as long as possible, to increase the opportunities for continued social engagement and community participation for people with dementia, and to help people with dementia and their carers to plan for their futures, including organising financial and legal affairs and preparing for the longer term or more intensive care requirements and, of course, how best to deliver awareness and communication on dementia and dementia related services into the community. We know that the earlier it is diagnosed the better it is for the person who has the illness. They can put their affairs into place and prepare for the future. It also prepares those around them for the future.

We have had many hearings. We have had a hearing in my electorate in Adelaide where we had a fantastic organisation, MAC or Multicultural Aged Care, come and brief us on the particular challenges of dementia for people from non-English-speaking backgrounds—things that you would not even necessarily think of: for example, how some aged-care workers took one old man to be talking gibberish, but it turned out that he was asking in Italian for his favourite brand of bottled mineral water and life was made much easier for that person once someone could communicate with him. Most recently, we were up in the electorate of the member for Parkes, visiting Moree, where we heard from some of the local organisations about the challenges of dementia care in rural settings.

It is very important to be able to provide services for the people who we need to look after in their old age and those suffering from this debilitating disease of dementia.