

Media Statement

SOUTH AFRICA COMMEMORATES WORLD ALZHEIMER'S DAY

Pretoria, 21 September 2023: The Department of Social Development joins the world in commemorating World Alzheimer's Day, which is observed globally this year under the theme: "Closing the Circle: Addressing Gender-Based Violence (GBV) in Older Age Policy, Law and Evidence-based Responses".

The department of social development re-commits itself in playing a significant role in providing support, care, and services to people with Alzheimer's and Dementia and their families across the country.

September 21 is World Alzheimer's Day and the day was set aside to raise awareness and challenge the stigma surrounding Alzheimer's and Dementia. The campaign aims to underscore the pivotal role of identifying risk factors and adopting proactive risk reduction measures to delay, and potentially even prevent, the onset of dementia. World Alzheimer's Day, is an international event, always held on the 21st of September of each year in September and run by Alzheimer's Disease International, (ADI).

The day aims to educate the public, support caregivers, and advocate for better understanding and treatment of Alzheimer's. It provides an opportunity to promote early detection, encourage research, and reduce the stigma surrounding the disease.

Additionally, the day provides an opportunity for communities to promote a better understanding of the diseases by raising awareness of the cultural, social, economic and demographic processes affecting older persons.

On this day, government, organisations, and key stakeholders that deliver services to people with Alzheimer's around the world concentrate their efforts on raising awareness about Alzheimer's and Dementia.

Alzheimer's affects the brain and leads to eventual death of nerve cells and loss of brain tissue, which is regarded as the most common cause of Dementia. Of significance to note, is that every 68 seconds, someone develops Alzheimer's disease.

Alzheimer's disease is often called a family disease because the chronic stress of watching a loved one slowly decline affects everyone. With the increases in life spans, support for Alzheimer's research is more critical to our families than ever.

Conversely, Dementia includes a set of symptoms which are caused by various diseases (for example Alzheimer's), but they are not a disease by themselves. There are more than 100 types of dementia - the most common being Alzheimer's and vascular dementia - all of which are progressive (they get worse over time).

• Dementia identifies a group of symptoms that affect the brain including:

➤ Memory Loss

➤ Changes in personality and mood

Difficulties in problem solving, thinking, and speaking

As of 2013, there were an estimated 44.4 million people with dementia worldwide. This number will increase to an estimated 75.6 million in 2030, and 135.5 million in 2050. Already 62% of people with dementia live in developing countries, but by 2050 this will rise to 71%.

According to South Africa's 2011 census, there are approximately 2.2 million people in South Africa with some form of dementia.

Across a few of the provinces, and some parts specially, there is a growing percentage of older persons who continue to be targeted and burned or killed and made to leave their communities due to accusations of witchcraft which is a prevalent stigma associated with Alzheimer's and Dementia in the country.

In this regard, the Department of Social Development works with provinces, various government departments, Non-Governmental Organizations, Civil Society Organizations, the South African Older Persons Forum, network structures and organizations of Older Persons, the National House of Traditional Leaders and all key stakeholders in addressing the plight of people living with Alzheimer's and Dementia, which has become of concern for DSD and all its key stakeholders.

Today, the department appeals to communities to protect and care for older persons.

ISSUED BY THE NATIONAL DEPARTMENT OF SOCIAL DEVELOPMENT

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