

Dementia surge to cost \$153B by 2038: report

Monday, January 4, 2010 |

CBC News

The prevalence of dementia in Canada will more than double in 30 years with the costs increasing 10-fold, if no changes are made, according to a new report.

The Alzheimer Society of Canada commissioned the report, entitled *Rising Tide: The Impact of Dementia on Canadian Society*, which projects that the number of cases will more than double to 1.25 million by 2038 as society ages.

'You think, "Oh yeah, I can manage this, I can do all these things, I don't need any help." And while I was certainly getting help, I probably should have had a lot more and sooner.'

— Gerry Matier

Today, someone in Canada develops dementia every five minutes. The report's authors suggest that will change to one new case every two minutes in 30 years, meaning the total costs associated with the mind-robbing disease could reach \$153 billion a year by 2038, adjusting for inflation, up from the current \$15 billion a year.

The society suggests four key ways to slow the growth in cases of Alzheimer's and dementia:

- Promoting healthier lifestyles, such as getting people over 65 to increase their physical activity levels.
- Investing in support and education for caregivers. About 85 per cent of people who look after individuals with Alzheimer's are women, and caregivers are aging, too.
- Adding "system navigators," or a care advocate, to guide families through the complex health-care system.
- Combining risk reduction strategies to delay the onset of dementia by two years, such as through the discovery of new treatments.

"We believe that if people that are already active were to increase that level of activity as much as 50 per cent ... then it would make more of a real impact on the number of people and the amount of money that this disease costs," society spokesman David Harvey told CBC News.

"Being out on a day like today, walking briskly, is a good thing from the point of view of protecting the brain, and

making sure that all of your vascular risk factors like high blood pressure, diabetes, high cholesterol are optimally treated," said Dr. Sandra Black, a neuroscientist at Sunnybrook Health Sciences Centre in Toronto, commenting on the report. "These are ways that you can as an individual help yourself."

The society would like to see annual funding for research into the causes and treatments of dementia tripled to \$72 million from the current \$24 million.

National strategy urged

The report's authors also predict that the overall amount of unpaid care delivered by family members will more than triple by 2038, to 756 million hours from the current 231 million hours.

Gerry Matier of Vancouver learned how quickly life can change when his wife, Diane Jamieson, was diagnosed with a form of dementia that progressively destroyed her ability to communicate and to care for herself.

Just 47 when symptoms began in late 1998, the former registered nurse had developed frontal temporal dementia.

Matier, executive director of the Insurance Council of British Columbia, became his wife's primary caregiver, which he planned to continue. But in 2006, her condition deteriorated and he had to put his wife into long-term care.

"I think I made a mistake like most caregivers," he said. "You think, 'Oh yeah, I can manage this, I can do all these things, I don't need any help.' And while I was certainly getting help, I probably should have had a lot more and sooner."

Another caregiver, Shirley Sagle of Sudbury, Ont., is looking for more affordable support. Sagle said she spends a good part of her day worrying about her 79-year-old mother, who was diagnosed with dementia four years ago.

"We need more nursing and home care, we really do," said Sagle, adding she's afraid her mother will put up a fight if they try to move her out of her condo. "Because people do not want to leave their homes. We need more affordable home care for them."

The study was conducted by RiskAnalytica, a Toronto-based consultancy firm that specializes in risk management. The project was funded by the Canadian Institutes of Health Research, the Public Health Agency of Canada, Health Canada, Pfizer Canada and Rx&D.