

# BRINGING ARTS ON PRESCRIPTION INTO THE HOME FOR PEOPLE LIVING WITH DEMENTIA

A RESEARCH BRIEF BY THE UNSW AGEING FUTURES INSTITUTE

New research highlights the potential for bringing participatory arts into the home to support the health and wellbeing of people living with dementia and their family carers.

## BACKGROUND AND CURRENT ISSUE

More than 420,000 Australians currently live with dementia, with this number predicted to nearly double by 2050. Dementia leads to changes in everyday functioning, across a range of areas such as thinking, communication, behaviour, personality, self-care, social and physical abilities. Offering allied health and supportive treatments are crucial to maximise wellbeing for people living with dementia and to support living at home for as long as possible. As dementia progresses, accessing activities and services in the community can become more difficult, thus, offering a range of supportive programs within people's home is crucial.

## SUMMARY OF CURRENT RESEARCH

Arts on Prescription at home (AoP@Home) involves a professional artist visiting a person with dementia in their own home to engage them (and sometimes their family member) in art-making (1). The original pilot of AoP@Home showed positive outcomes for both the person with dementia and their family carer, however, this was conducted in a research setting (2). In a more recent study, AoP@Home was delivered within a real-world community aged care setting for people living with dementia. Participants with dementia and family carers were satisfied with the program and reported improvements in their health and wellbeing at the end of the program. In parallel, artists and program managers supported the program as an important offering for people living with dementia (1,3).

While ongoing service development is needed to consolidate AoP@Home as a sustainable and broadly available offering for people living with dementia, the outcomes of this study highlight the potential to offer programs such as AoP@Home using available government funding avenues.

## RECOMMENDATIONS AND IMPLICATIONS

Most Australians with dementia live at home in the community and wish to continue doing so. With the number of Australians living with dementia expected to almost double over the next 30 years, it is vital that programs such as AoP@Home are made available in parallel with allied health and other care services.

Our findings have shown that programs such as AoP@Home can be delivered using available government funding. As funding landscapes change, ongoing access to appropriate funding for social prescribing programs for Australians living with dementia is imperative.

## REFERENCES

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## ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Dr Claire O'Connor is a Senior Research Fellow in the School of Psychology, UNSW, a Conjoint Senior Research Fellow with NeuRA, Honorary Senior Research Fellow with HammondCare, and is also a registered occupational therapist (AHPRA). Claire is currently undertaking a Dementia Centre for Research Collaboration (DCRC) post-doctoral fellowship to understand how to bridge the implementation gap to maximise everyday functioning for people living with dementia through evidence-informed reablement and rehabilitation. Combining her clinical training in occupational therapy and research skills, Claire is passionate about contributing to research that is meaningful to ageing populations and people impacted by dementia.