

AUSTRALIAN YOUNG ONSET DEMENTIA CONFERENCE 2026

Detailed conference program

Friday 20 November 2026 · Ann Harding Conference Centre, University of Canberra

TIME	PRESENTER	TITLE AND BIOGRAPHY
08:00 – 09:00	Registration Delegate check-in, badge distribution	
09:00 – 09:30	Conference Opening	
	Welcome to Country	
	Conference opening	
	Opening remarks	
09:30 – 11:00	Plenary Session 1	
	Bill Yeates Person living with young onset dementia	A personal reflection: What does ‘hope’ mean for a person living with dementia William Yeates is a dementia advocate, speaker and former educator who was diagnosed with younger-onset Alzheimer’s disease in 2019. Through his advocacy work with national and international dementia organisations, he shares his lived experience to promote awareness, reduce stigma and demonstrate how people can continue to live meaningful and active lives following a dementia diagnosis.
	Professor Mary Pat Sullivan Principal Lead, Rare Dementia Support Canada	Developing Rare Dementia Support Canada: Stories, Relationships, Creative Practices, and Evaluation Frameworks Professor Mary Pat Sullivan is registered social worker, and social gerontologist at Nipissing University, Canada. Professor Sullivan is the Principal Lead of Rare Dementia Support (RDS) Canada, a tailored support community for people with dementia, including many people with young onset dementia, led by Nipissing University and in partnership with RDS in the United Kingdom. Dr Sullivan’s research focusses on the social context of ageing, including dementia care and support, social isolation, and loneliness.

TIME	PRESENTER	TITLE AND BIOGRAPHY
	Carola Renders Director, Knowledge Centre for Young Onset Dementia, Netherlands	Connecting Practice, Education and Research in Young-Onset Dementia Care: The Dutch Young-Onset Dementia Knowledge Centre Carola Renders is director of the Kenniscentrum Dementie op Jonge Leefijd (Knowledge Centre for Young Onset Dementia) in the Netherlands. She is a recognised advocate and leader in the Young Onset Dementia field, combining professional leadership with personal lived experience of the condition. Her contributions include directing the Kenniscentrum's work to improve care and support for younger people with dementia and their families, contributing to research and international collaborations such as the Joint Solutions Young Onset Dementia Project, and public advocacy through media, conferences, and symposia to raise awareness of the condition among healthcare professionals, employers, and the wider public.
	Sonya Glasson Senior Project Manager, Australian Institute of Health and Welfare	Health and economic impacts of young onset dementia in Australia: Preliminary findings Sonya Glasson is a senior project manager at the Australian Institute of Health and Welfare (AIHW) in Canberra, where she leads major national data development and reporting projects, including dementia data and the Cost of Dementia program. She has extensive experience across research, health policy, health data, and program management.

11:00 – 11:30 Morning Tea

11:30 – 13:00 Plenary Session 2

Associate Professor Samantha Loi University of Melbourne	Young onset dementia: from clinical need to service development at the Royal Melbourne Hospital Associate Professor Samantha Loi is a principal research fellow and neuropsychiatrist at the University of Melbourne and Royal Melbourne Hospital. A/Prof Loi is widely recognised as a leader in the Young Onset Dementia field, advancing research, advocacy, and service improvement. Her leadership includes serving as former chair of the <i>Young Onset Dementia Special Interest Group</i> (YOD-SIG), leader of the <i>Joint Solutions Young Onset Dementia</i> report, and co-leader of the new <i>Forward with Dementia</i> website.
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Eliza Hazlett

Dementia Australia

Driving systemic change through service delivery and living experience insights

Eliza Hazlett is the Executive Director for policy and government relations at Dementia Australia. She brings more than 25 years of senior leadership experience in the federal public service. In the Department of Health and Aged Care, she led expansion of dementia services and supports in response to the Royal Commission into Aged Care Quality and Safety and the design and implementation of the Specialist Dementia Care Program. As Assistant Secretary of the Dementia, Diversity and Design Branch she guided development of the National Dementia Action Plan 2024-2034 endorsed by the Commonwealth and all State and Territory Governments.

Prior to joining Dementia Australia, Eliza was Branch Manager of Codesign at the National Disability Insurance Agency, championing the inclusion of lived experience in shaping NDIS reforms. Eliza is passionate about improving the lives of people impacted by dementia and is dedicated to ensuring that Government policies and programs reflect and address their needs.

Associate Professor Elissa Burton

Curtin University

YOD Research in WA: what we're doing, where we're going

Associate Professor Elissa Burton is a healthy ageing researcher at Curtin University and Co-Lead of the Dementia and Ageing Domain within the Curtin enAble Institute, she also has a co-joint position in the Brightwater Research Centre. Associate Professor Burton's work focusses on supporting independence for people with young onset dementia and her work includes developing a YOD Resource Pack, a signs and symptoms checklist and exploring what works and what doesn't in WA for people living with young onset dementia.

Professor Muireann Irish

University of Sydney

MotDem: A multidimensional framework for the early detection of frontotemporal dementia

Muireann Irish is Professor of Cognitive Neuroscience and NHMRC Leadership Fellow (L1) at the Brain and Mind Centre, University of Sydney, where she leads the Irish Lab. Her research explores mechanisms of cognitive, motivational, and behavioural changes in younger-onset dementia, with a focus on frontotemporal dementia. Using innovative approaches, her work seeks to improve the early and accurate detection of younger-onset dementia and to support people to live well with dementia.

Panel discussion**13:00 – 14:00 Lunch**

14:00 – 15:15 Concurrent Streams 1 and 2

Stream 1: Young People in Nursing Homes Alliance

Dr Bronwyn Morkham

Young People in Nursing Homes Alliance

The Joint Solutions Project: lighting the fire for change

Dr Bronwyn Morkham is the CEO of the Young People in Nursing Homes Alliance and the interim CEO of Young Dementia Australia. Bronwyn is an experienced social policy campaigner who has been a member of numerous government advisory bodies, worked extensively at the intersection of the NDIS and health services and supported many people with disability with complex individual advocacy. Bronwyn also coordinated and contributed to the Joint Solutions Young Onset Dementia Project.

Vicki Barry

YODWA

Networking for collective impact: shaping the future of YOD in Western Australia

Vicki is an accomplished professional with extensive leadership and operational management experience across business, government, health and the social sectors. A systems and possibility thinker, her signature strength is the ability to engage with stakeholders and work collaboratively in partnership to conceptualise, plan, develop and deliver desired outcomes for social impact. Life changed considerably when her partner began to show signs of young dementia 16 years ago. Combining her professional and living experience, she is on a mission to change the trajectory and improve the experience for people living with YOD.

Dr Clare Beard & Craig MacDonald

Young Dementia Australia: a national voice of our own

Dr Clare Beard specialises in young onset dementia, with a focus on underserved and underrepresented populations. Her PhD research explored modifiable dementia risk factors among people experiencing homelessness, highlighting the importance of stable housing for cognitive wellbeing. With extensive health sector experience, she has worked closely with people living with young onset dementia and communities experiencing cultural, linguistic and housing-related disadvantage.

Craig brings over 25 years of professional dementia care experience across nursing, diversional therapy, respite and education. Following his wife's younger onset dementia diagnosis in 2021, he combines professional expertise with a deeply personal lived experience. He provides a unique, vital perspective to advocate for and support young people living with dementia and their families.

Stream 2

Dr Samuel Warren

Postdoctoral Researcher, The University of Sydney

Staging frontotemporal dementia using multimodal features and event-based modelling

Dr Samuel Warren is a postdoctoral researcher working under Professor Muireann Irish in Frontier and the Irish lab at the University of Sydney. His work primarily investigates cognitive-behavioural changes in younger-onset dementia (YOD) using novel biostatistical and artificial intelligence (AI) models. This work is best reflected by his work coordinating the MotDem project, developing a new tool for motivational changes in YOD. Dr Warren has also published considerable research on individual-level disease prediction using deep neural networks, and advocates for the meaningful application of AI methods to dementia research.

Dr Dhamidhu Eratne

Consultant Neuropsychiatrist, The Royal Melbourne Hospital and The University of Melbourne

From promise to practice: Blood and other markers for earlier accurate diagnosis of young-onset dementia, and improved care and outcomes

Dr Dhamidhu Eratne is a Consultant Neuropsychiatrist and clinician-scientist who leads the Melbourne Young-Onset Dementia Clinic at the Royal Melbourne Hospital, with academic appointments at the University of Melbourne, The Florey Institute, and WEHI. His clinical and research work centres on the diagnosis and management of young-onset dementia, including Huntington's disease, with a particular focus on improving diagnostic accuracy and reducing the diagnostic delay common in this population. As Chief Investigator on the MiND Study, he researches blood and CSF biomarkers to help distinguish neurodegenerative from primary psychiatric disorders in younger patients. He completed his PhD in 2025 and has 65 publications.

Dr Sharon Savage

Senior Lecturer, University of Newcastle

Co-designing goal-oriented cognitive rehabilitation for people living with primary progressive aphasia

Dr Sharon Savage is a registered Clinical Neuropsychologist and senior lecturer in the School of Science at the University of Newcastle, with more than 15 years of experience in clinical research. Her work focuses on young onset dementia, specifically primary progressive aphasia and language changes in behavioural variant frontotemporal dementia, cognitive rehabilitation, and dementia risk reduction. Across this work, she aims to improve the identification, understanding and practical management of cognitive difficulties, with a strong emphasis on translating research into real-world clinical benefit.

Dr Wendy Longley & Dr Wendy Kelso

Uniting War Memorial Hospital;
Neuropsychiatry Centre, Royal
Melbourne Hospital

Multiple Sclerosis and Dementia: What People with MS, Clinicians and Service Providers Need to Know

Dr Wendy Longley is a Senior Clinical Neuropsychologist. In addition to providing specialist clinical, education, and advocacy services to people affected by progressive neurological conditions, including young onset dementia, for 40 years, she has published many peer-reviewed articles, and has designed and collaboratively built innovative new services, such as a specialist psychology unit at the Multiple Sclerosis Society of NSW and the Integrated Rehabilitation for Early-Stage Dementia (iREADi) Program at the Uniting War Memorial Hospital. She has also worked to protect the human rights and wellbeing of people with dementia via her work as a Senior Professional Member of NCAT – Guardianship Division.

Dr Wendy Kelso is the Coordinator of Neuropsychology Services, Neuropsychiatry Centre, Royal Melbourne Hospital, Victoria. With 20 years' experience, she specialises in atypical dementias and supporting families living with Young Onset Dementia (YOD). Her research spans YOD, Huntington's disease, cognition and behaviour, carer support, biomarkers and telehealth. Dr Kelso facilitates FTD carer support groups for Dementia Support Australia.

Dr Maryam Ghahramani

Senior Lecturer and Program
Director of Engineering,
University of Canberra

Multimodal Digital Biomarkers for Younger Onset Dementia Detection

Dr Maryam Ghahramani is a Senior Lecturer and Program Director of Engineering at the University of Canberra. Her interdisciplinary research sits at the intersection of health and technology, with a strong focus on dementia, Parkinson's disease, ageing, balance, and pain assessment. She uses multimodal sensing, AI, and advanced computational methods to enable early detection, targeted rehabilitation, and improved functional independence. Dr Ghahramani has secured approximately A\$1 million in competitive external and internal research funding and leads multidisciplinary projects that translate engineering innovations into real-world healthcare solutions.

15:15 – 15:30 Afternoon Tea



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15:30 – 16:45 Concurrent Streams 3 and 4

Stream 3: Dementia Australia and lived experience perspectives

Natalie Sutherland

Senior Family Engagement
Counsellor, Dementia Australia,

Integrative systemic family counselling: A model of care for families living with young onset dementia

Since 2023, Natalie has served as a Family Engagement Counsellor with Dementia Australia. She is an Accredited Social Worker with nearly two decades of experience supporting individuals, couples, and families across the contexts of family and relationship counselling, LGBTQI+ health, and dementia care. In her work, Natalie uses Narrative Practices to explore how Younger Onset Dementia (YOD) impacts the family unit, shining a light on the creative, unique, and innovative ways families respond to the problems of dementia in their lives.

Melissa Farley & Clynton Whalan

National Manager, Connecting
Peers Program, Dementia
Australia

Peer support as an empowerment tool for people living with young onset dementia

Melissa Farley is the National Manager of the Connecting Peers Program at Dementia Australia, joining Dementia Australia in 2021 after many years working in the community health, aged and disability sectors. Mel is a passionate believer in co-design and working with people with living experience to put their expertise at the centre of service design and provision. When not working, Mel loves to spend time in nature, horseback riding through the Gippsland bush and beyond.

Clynton Whalan has been a Peer Leader in Dementia Australia's Connecting Peers program since October 2025. Diagnosed with Alzheimer's Disease at the age of 65, Clynton's living experience provides valuable insight into living with undiagnosed Young Onset Dementia and navigating an aged care system not designed to meet the needs of people developing dementia at a younger age. Clynton's volunteer role as a Peer Leader has empowered participants to live independently by using technology and other creative strategies.

Zoe Finlayson

Registered nurse and Dementia
support specialist, Dementia
Australia

The impact of YOD on family life

Zoe Finlayson is a Registered nurse and Dementia Support Specialist with Dementia Australia. Zoe has been working with people living with dementia for 12 years across in-patient, residential and community health settings. Since late 2024, Zoe has been a key support for people impacted by Young Onset Dementia, running a monthly carer support group, providing group education, and offering one on one appointments with practical support and advice.

TIME	PRESENTER	TITLE AND BIOGRAPHY
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Rose Beard

Dementia Advocate, Dementia Australia

A life of overcoming obstacles: my story of never giving up, finding my way of learning and lessons from disability to dementia advocacy

Rose is a dementia advocate, disability representative and passionate speaker. She uses her voice and life story to raise awareness of living with cognitive disability, challenge stigma and discrimination, and motivate others to never give up until they find their way of learning.

Rose has completed certificates in Aged Care, Disability Support, Mental Health and Child Care. She has worked in residential aged care, supporting people living with dementia and their families. Rose is passionate about equality in education, drawn from her personal experience of successfully returning to education as an adult.

She is an experienced advocate and speaker with the ACT Mental Health Consumer Network and has spoken at numerous conferences. Rose joined the Dementia Advocates Program in 2025 and has contributed to research projects, community consultations, and dementia policy.

Roslyn Van Welie

Lived experience – care partner

The Journey Begins. A partner’s perspective, from noticing changes to becoming a carer for someone with young onset dementia

Roslyn Van Welie is the founder and owner of Curly Girl Numbers, a Perth-based national bookkeeping and BAS Agent practice. She has more than 30 years of experience in financial management. Roslyn is a Fellow of the Institute of Certified Bookkeepers and has been a Non-Executive Director of the Institute since 2019. She is also the carer for her husband Paul, who is living with young onset dementia, and she shares her family’s story to help others recognise the early signs. Outside of work, she is an award-winning photographer and travel enthusiast.

Stream 4

Marie Alford

General Manager Growth and Innovation, HammondCare

The Missing Piece of the Puzzle: Supporting Young Adults Whose Parents Live with Younger Onset Dementia

Marie Alford is the General Manager Growth and Innovation at HammondCare. She has led Dementia Support Australia, a national service supporting people with complex dementia and those who care for them. With a background in social work, advocacy, and leadership, Marie brings over 20 years' experience in behaviour support, complex dementia, and inclusive, rights-based care. Her current focus is innovation in home, retirement and seniors living, including cognitive frameworks and programs that support people to live where they choose. She is a member of the Department of Health, Aged and Disability Expert Advisory Group, with expertise in complex dementia, design, trauma, and supporting people from diverse life experiences. Marie is also a published writer and regular media contributor, passionate about elevating lived experiences.

Joan Fang

PhD Candidate, Department of Social Work, The University of Melbourne

Family needs and service responses in young-onset dementia: Preliminary findings from a retrospective clinical data mining study

Joan Fang is a PhD candidate in the Department of Social Work at the University of Melbourne, conducting her research in collaboration with the Royal Melbourne Hospital Neuropsychiatry Centre. Her PhD, Strengthening Family Support in Young-Onset Dementia, combines a scoping review, clinical data mining of family needs and service responses, and co-design of a family support model. This presentation reports on the second phase of her research. A social worker by training, Joan aims to translate evidence into family-responsive care, develop and evaluate interventions alongside families and services, and build young-onset dementia research collaborations across Australia and the Asia-Pacific.

Dr Rodney Jilek

Managing Director, Community Home Australia

The community home model – An international Balinese resort for people living with young onset dementia and disability

Dr Jilek is a Registered Nurse, clinical advisor, researcher, advocate and Adjunct Professor with 30 years' experience in aged care and dementia, supporting people living with neurocognitive disability. In 2021 he established and fully funded Community Home Australia, an internationally recognised leader in younger onset dementia support.

TIME	PRESENTER	TITLE AND BIOGRAPHY
	Robyn Lewis PhD Candidate, Centre for Ageing Research and Translation, University of Canberra	Small-scale Care for People Living with Young Onset Dementia: Where are they and what is the experience of care? Robyn Lewis is a PhD candidate in the Centre for Ageing Research and Translation, University of Canberra. Robyn's PhD is supported by Community Home Australia and focuses on the perspectives, challenges and opportunities associated with small-scale residential dementia care. She hopes her research will improve the quality of life for people with dementia, reduce burden for family carers, improve the experience of staff working in dementia care and provide guidance for organisations to deliver this innovative model of care. Post PhD, Robyn hopes to combine her interests with research related to ageing, disability, dementia and holistic health, alongside her business activities as a registered Yoga Therapist.
	Dr Hayley Antipas & Vicki Barry Attuned Health Group; care partner of a person with YOD	When Words Don't Come Easy: the Power of Music and Song Dr Hayley Antipas is a Registered and Neurologic Music Therapist and Director of Attuned Health, a music therapy practice and consulting service. Hayley is experienced working with brain injury rehabilitation, mental health, adult disability and dementia, and has designed, led and delivered Western Australia's largest aged care music and wellbeing program. She is committed to supporting people to live well with dementia and enhancing aged care workforce capacity through music therapy skill-sharing. She is a postdoctoral researcher with the University of Melbourne investigating Music Attuned Technology for Care via eHealth (MATCH) to improve consumer, family and staff living experiences of dementia. Co-presenter Vicki Barry is an accomplished professional with extensive leadership and operational management experience across business, government, health and the social sectors. A systems and possibility thinker, her signature strength is the ability to engage with stakeholders and work collaboratively in partnership to conceptualise, plan, develop and deliver desired outcomes for social impact. Life changed considerably when her partner began to show signs of young dementia 16 years ago. Combining her professional and living experience, she is on a mission to change the trajectory and improve the experience for people living with YOD.
16:45 – 17:00 Closing remarks and conference close		
17:00	Networking	