



# Wrestling with the tough topics

The International Dementia Conference won't be shying away from the most serious issues in the world of dementia care this September.

**A**s countries around the world set new standards, are the unintended consequences of regulation affecting quality of life for older people (and their carers)?

Is strictly monitoring and controlling the sexuality of people living with cognitive decline in fact a violation of their fundamental freedoms and dignity?

In light of some high-profile events, how exactly should the sector and first responders work together to support people living with dementia?

Thorny questions like these would spark debate in most health and aged care workplace lunchrooms – some of them probably quite heated.

So, plenty of lively conversation can be expected at

September's International Dementia Conference 2024 (IDC2024), with these tough topics (among others) on the agenda for presentations, panels and – inevitably – break-time chat.

Featuring a global line-up of guests, with ABC journalist and author Leigh Sales as the master of ceremonies, the two-day gathering aims to provoke both discussion and action.

It will include input from international experts, industry leaders and those working in the frontline, as well as the voices of people living with dementia and their carers.

IDC2024 will bring together health professionals, researchers, advocates and those with lived experience who are all dedicated to improving the lives of people living



**Dr Nathan Davies**



**Dr Nathalie Huitema**



**Sarah Mitchell**

with dementia," said Angela Raguz, general manager of The Dementia Centre, which is running the conference.

"All are working together to address the myriad of issues facing an ever-increasing number of people in an ageing society."

Taking the theme 'In the Arena', event organisers hope delegates will wrestle with hard issues, drawing from a 1910 quote from Theodore Roosevelt.

In it, he famously praises the person in the arena - the one 'doing the deed', striving valiantly, who may make mistakes, but who gets up and continues the fight.

"The International Dementia Conference 2024 will give a platform to those who are bold enough to 'dare greatly' in the difficult arena of complex dementia, palliative care and positive ageing," said Ms Raguz.

### Expert speakers

A look through the line-up for IDC2024 reveals a strong showing of international experts, such as Dr Samir Sinha from Canada, Dr Nathalie Huitema (Netherlands/US), Dr Nathan Davies (England) and Dr Tom Russ (Scotland).

Dr Sinha is regarded as one of Canada's most influential voices for older people. A clinician and international expert in the care of older adults, he is the director of geriatrics at Sinai Health System and brings decades of experience guiding government policy on aged care.

He will discuss some of the challenges faced in both the Australian and Canadian regulatory systems.

"Regulations can sometimes not produce what we want for people with dementia," Dr Sinha said.

"The over-regulation of aged care and the management of risks that come with it - where the ultimate goal is 'safety' - can result in a situation where people end up merely as a list of boxes to be ticked, rather than as humans."

At IDC2024, Dr Sinha will seek to address some of the

complexities (in both countries) driven by staff pay inequities and risk management, as well as data collection and procedural requirements, and he'll cast a vision for a future that treats high-quality staff as an unequivocal priority, allowing care providers to treat patients as whole human beings.

Raising one of the most sensitive topics in aged care will be sexologist and psychologist Dr Nathalie Huitema.

Originally from the Netherlands but now based in the US, Dr Huitema will address the hidden expiration date on sexual consent for older adults with cognitive impairment/dementia.

"The decline in cognitive ability is often considered equal to an inability to consent to sexual behaviour," Dr Huitema said.

"Unfortunately, it is common for healthcare professionals to overlook the sexual consent of individuals living in long-term care with cognitive impairments.

"While striving for a risk-free existence might seem appealing, I believe that eliminating all risks results in a life lacking fulfilment."

Bringing the latest perspectives on palliative dementia care will be Dr Nathan Davies, professor of ageing, applied health and care research, Queen Mary University of London (UK).

He will be speaking about some of the challenges and complexities of delivering high quality palliative care for people living with dementia, particularly in relation to complex care decisions.

With a focus on the challenges of complex care decisions, Dr Davies will outline practical approaches and resources that can provide a way forward, and share decision-support tools co-designed with people living with dementia.

Meanwhile Scottish dementia researcher and psychiatrist Dr Tom Russ will set the clinical tone for IDC2024 by providing delegates with an insight into the latest treatment advances in the dementia arena.



**Dr Tom Russ**



**Leigh Sales**



**Dr Samir Sinha**

Dr Russ, the director of Alzheimer Scotland Dementia Research Centre, will present a wide-ranging clinical update on promising approaches and proven treatments for different forms of dementia, taking listeners from the present to the methods and supports of the future.

#### Diverse voices

The panels and concurrent sessions at IDC2024 cover a wide range of topics, with something to interest everyone and a strong presence from people living with dementia and their carers.

The main stage panels will tackle issues such as the role of first responders, the future of dementia care at home and in the community, and dementia stereotypes in the media.

Panellists include Assistant Commissioner Scott Duval (South Australian Police), Martin Rix (Belong, UK), Nicole Smith (Community Home Australia), Lindsay Bent (Ambulance Victoria), Dr Tim Henwood (Southern Cross Care) and Bill Yeates (Dementia Support Australia).

As MC, Leigh Sales will also facilitate most of the panels, where she's expected to bring her signature incisive and compassionate style to some potentially sensitive discussions.

Almost certain to be one of the most closely followed conversations is one scheduled for Day 2 (6 September), titled 'Palliative care in an age of voluntary assisted dying'.

On the stage with Leigh will be the aforementioned Dr Nathan Davies, independent clinical governance and medico-legal consultant Dr Melanie Tan and development director for Compassionate Communities UK Dr Emma Hodges.

They'll be joined by Sarah Mitchell, a registered nurse from the north of England with a background in palliative care and oncology, who also supported her mum – well-known blogger Wendy Mitchell – to live as independently as she could with dementia over a period of 10 years.

Following Wendy's death in February 2024, through the act of 'voluntary stopping eating and drinking' (VSED), Sarah feels moved to share her experience to push forward the discussion around the complexities of dementia and assisted dying.

Meanwhile, the 50 concurrent sessions will bring experience and expertise from as far afield as Ireland, the UK, the Netherlands, the US, Taiwan and Uganda.

They will cover a diverse range of disciplines – such as allied health, nursing, academia, research, architects, and family carers – and topics as varied as younger onset dementia, specialist palliative care for people living with dementia, supporting LGBT+ and First Nations people with dementia, and aged care reforms.

#### A chance to connect

Apart from the main program, IDC2024 delegates are invited to an interactive breakfast symposium on aged care reforms and dementia hosted by the Department of Health and Aged Care, an event that is sure to be well-attended.

There is also an evening networking event at the Hilton's Zeta Bar.

"One of the goals of IDC2024 is to foster connections between colleagues in this often-challenging arena," Ms Raguz said.

"This is their chance to get up to speed on the latest thinking, but also to build relationships – we're all in this together."

#### FIND OUT MORE

**The International Dementia Conference will be held on 5-6 September 2024 at the Hilton, Sydney.**  
 For more information go to <https://www.dementiaconference.com/>

# Conference bursary to ensure the future is in good hands

Leaders of the future encouraged to apply for unique opportunity

“Be present in the moment. And drop our egos – it’s not about us, it’s about the person that we’re with.”

That’s the advice of home support worker and International Dementia Conference 2024 (IDC2024) Future Leader bursary recipient Alyson McNamara, who is passionate about improving the lives of people living with dementia.

She was put forward for one of the bursary places by her employer, aged and community care provider Resthaven in South Australia, and she’s over the moon to be given the opportunity.

“I’m looking forward to listening, learning, observing, meeting people, having the tough discussions that people maybe struggle with,” said Alyson.

The Future Leaders bursaries are an opportunity for up and coming, early-career professionals, who – if selected – receive a complementary, two-day registration to IDC2024 worth \$1,349.

“We want to celebrate and nurture the next generation of leaders in the field of dementia care and support, so we’re waiving the cost to get them into the arena,” said Marie Alford, head of dementia professional services at The Dementia Centre, which is running the conference.

“We know that the future of dementia care is in their hands, and we want them to be ready.”

Alyson was nominated by Resthaven’s executive manager of community services and retirement living Mel Ottaway, who said her stand-out qualities were kindness, patience, the ability to laugh and a desire to get to know people.

“She brings passion and excitement, and wants to learn every day, with everything she does,” said Mel.



Resthaven executive manager of community services and retirement living Mel Ottaway with home support worker Alyson McNamara, who is looking forward to attending IDC2024 as a Future Leader bursary recipient.

“She wants to do better and continue to grow, and that’s what I love and want to support.”

Alyson ‘absolutely loves’ her job and hopes to be part of changes for the better in the future of dementia care.

“There definitely needs to be more education for workers – education about the language that we use, the questions that we ask, how to be aware of the energies around us,” said Alyson.

“And listen to what they’re saying, and their stories, because a lot of the time from the stories I get a little clue as to how I can work with them better and make them feel safe.”

Mel urged other managers to put forward their best employees for the remaining Future Leader bursary opportunities, saying it’s a priceless chance for a team member to learn and grow.

“Do it – it’s an amazing opportunity!” she said.

IDC2024 is also offering bursaries to exceptional health and aged care students.

All bursary applications close 19 July 2024.

## FIND OUT MORE

The International Dementia Conference will be held at the Hilton Sydney on 5-6 September 2024  
- more details about the event and the bursaries can be found at <https://www.dementiaconference.com/>