Dementia: managing risks with what we already know

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Professor Henry Brodaty, co-director of the Centre for Healthy Brain Ageing at the University of NSW, is one of the recipients of $35.6m in federal funding.

**Millions of people around the world could ward off dementia by heeding the advice of previous health studies rather than waiting for future discoveries, according to one of Australia’s leading dementia researchers.**

Professor Henry Brodaty, the co-director of the Centre for Healthy Brain Ageing at the University of NSW, said that if older people increased by 5 or 10 per cent their efforts to manage risk factors, several million people could keep dementia at bay.

He cited a smaller Finnish trial, reported in *The Lancet* journal this year, in which older people were able to slow their cognitive decline by following a program providing healthy eating guidance, exercise, brain training and other support, based on previous research.

Professor Brodaty will be announced today as one of the recipients of $35.6 million in federal funding to help meet the challenges of an ageing population.

Alzheimer’s Australia has also secured the contract to establish the National Health and Medical Research Council’s $50m National Institute for Dementia Research. Six dementia research team grants are being funded under the Coalition’s $200m commitment to the field.

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Health Minister Susan Ley said the project headed by Professor Brodaty would be the largest clinical trial in the world for people aged 55-75 to test online tools designed to reduce their risk of dementia.

“While there is currently no cure for dementia, Australia is a world leader in the disease’s research and progress towards effective treatments,” she said.

His team will recruit 18,000 people for the clinical trial: half would be given information on managing risk factors, the rest would get extra support through online tools connecting them with medical specialists and tailored health interventions.

“The people in our trial will be young enough still to be able to prevent the accumulation of more pathology in their brain, and old enough that we can study the outcomes to benefit future generations,” he said.

“If our program works, the real attraction of it is that it is scaleable because it is all based on the internet and delivered via the internet. This is something that could be scaleable to the national level and even internationally.”