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WESTERN AUSTRALIAN CENTRE FOR
HEALTH X AGEING

MEDIA STATEMENT

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STUDY PROVES THAT OLDER ADULTS ARE MENTALLY TOUGH

A study published today in the Medical Journal of Australia shows a link between physical and mental decline in older adults.

The study found that rates of depression in older Australian adults are not as high as previous research studies have indicated.

“Depression amongst older adults is the exception not the rule in older adults,” said Dr Jon Pfaff, the study’s lead author, based at the Western Australian Centre for Health and Ageing.

Professor Osvaldo Almeida, Director of Research at the Western Australian Centre for Health and Ageing, said the results were very exciting for two reasons.

“We were able to confirm that poor physical health has a significant impact on mental wellbeing and, more importantly, we showed that older people are mentally very resilient, as only significant physical disability seems to undermine good mental health,” Professor Almeida said.

“It is as if the mind does not suffer the effects of ageing in the same way that the body does; our minds remain young until very late in life.”

Previous studies have shown that this age group responds well to treatment.

“With about 80 per cent of older Australian adults visiting their general practitioner at least once a year, this places GPs in a unique position to detect and address depression in this age group,” Dr Pfaff said.

The study included surveying more than 20,000 adults Australia-wide aged 60 years and over and was funded by grants from the National Health and Medical Research Council (NHMRC) and beyondblue: the national depression initiative.

An estimated eight per cent of older Australian adults suffer from depression at some point and it is predicted that depression will be the second leading cause of disability worldwide within the next 10 years, making it a major public health problem.

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The Western Australian Centre for Health & Ageing (WACHA) is dedicated to researching issues associated with ageing in order to extend healthy life. As the Australian population ages, this area of research is becoming increasingly vital. Ageing is a complex issue WACHA's researchers are addressing the gap in our knowledge by investigating common health conditions associated with ageing, such as dementia, mild cognitive impairment, falls, depression and frailty. To date the Centre has achieved notable success in cognitive impairment, mental health and Indigenous ageing. WACHA is one of Australia's most productive Research Centres.

WACHA is partnered with the WA Institute of Medical Research and the University of Western Australia and is a hospital based research centre. It is well placed to provide our local community with a multi disciplinary approach to scientific innovation in extending healthy life. For more information visit www.wacha.org.au