

Dementia in the Italian Community:

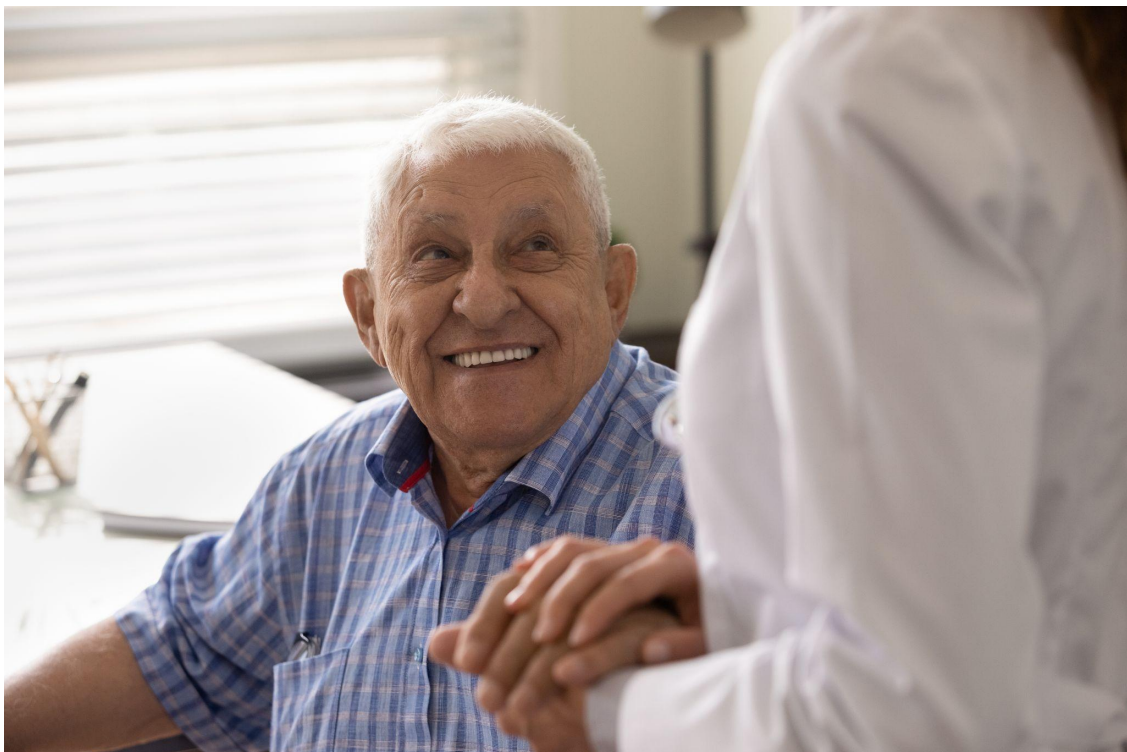
A Resource for Health and Social Care Providers

What is this resource?

- There are cultural differences in dementia care needs. With dementia rates among diverse ethno-racial populations growing in Canada, health and social care providers need resources to better support all people living with dementia.¹
- This resource provides a summary of research focusing on the unique experiences of people living with dementia in the Italian community, tailored for health and social care providers.

How can I use this resource?

- Use this resource to inform your care practices with people impacted by dementia in the Italian community.
- Share this resource with other health and social care providers.



Summary of Key Points

Perceptions of Aging

- Italian older adults do not associate turning 65 with feeling old.²
- There are gender differences in how aging is perceived – older Italian women are more likely to subjectively “feel older” than older Italian men.²
- Higher education among older Italians is linked to a lower likelihood of associating aging with loneliness and boredom, compared to those with lower education.²

Perceptions of Dementia

- There is a general lack of understanding and awareness regarding dementia, and the characteristics of the condition are believed to be part of the normal aging process.^{3,4}
- A portion of the Italian community can accurately identify stress as a risk factor for dementia.⁴

Influences of Tradition, Culture, and Family Duties on Caregiving

- There is a cultural and traditional norm where children are expected to take care of their aging parents and this duty typically falls to daughters.⁵
- Supporting older adults is a cultural obligation rather than a voluntary decision.⁵

Attitudes Towards Long-term Care

- Long-term care is often considered a last resort in the Italian community.⁵
- The institutionalization of older adults in long-term care carries negative connotations, implying the loss of independence and autonomy.⁵
- Gender differences – older women prefer aging at home, while older men prefer aging in long-term care.⁵

Introduction and Key Characteristics

- In 2021, more than 1.5 million individuals in Canada, or 4.3% of the population, self-identified as Italian.⁶
- Many Italian Canadian immigrants have origins in Italy's rural south, such as the regions of Sicily, Abruzzi, Molise, and Calabria.⁷
- The Italian language is used by most Italian individuals, and there are several Italian dialects.⁸

Perceptions of Aging

- Italian older adults do not associate turning 65 with feeling old.²
- Gender differences in perceptions of aging exist — older Italian women are more likely to “feel older” than older Italian men. Older Italian women associate old age with loneliness, loss of independence, and widowhood. Older Italian men connect aging with retirement.²
- Links between education and feeling old have been established. Older Italians with higher education are less likely to associate aging with loneliness and boredom than older Italians with less education.²

Perceptions of Dementia

- Perceptions of dementia in the Italian community vary.^{3,4}
- Among many, there exists a general lack of understanding and awareness regarding dementia, coupled with misconceptions concerning the causes of dementia, caregiving, and factors that increase or decrease the risk of dementia.³
- For others in the Italian community, the characteristics of dementia are believed to be part of the normal aging process.⁴

Influences of Tradition, Culture, and Family Duties on Caregiving

- In Italian communities, there is a cultural and traditional norm where children are expected to take on the responsibility of caring for their aging parents.⁵
- The duty to care for aging parents typically falls to daughters in the family, as older adults tend to prefer female caregivers.⁵
- However, in cases where an older adult does not have family or when children cannot take on the role of caregiver, seeking the aid of professional services is appropriate.⁵

Attitudes Towards Long-term Care

- In the Italian community, long-term care is often considered a last resort and older adults prefer to age at home with the help of family caregivers or professional services.⁵
- The decision of whether to go to long-term care is influenced by factors such as the availability of family support, finances, and the care needs of the older adult.⁵
- For many, moving to a long-term care home implies the loss of independence and autonomy.⁵
- Older Italian adults cite strict rules, lack of freedom, social isolation, and impacts on relationships with friends and family as reasons not to move to long-term care.⁵
- However, gender differences exist in the perception of long-term care — older women prefer aging at home, while older men, especially those with poor health status, prefer aging in long-term care homes.⁵

Where can I find more information?

Visit forwardwithdementia.ca to find resources about dementia for the Italian community (available in English, French and Italian). These resources can be helpful for people living with dementia and family and friend caregivers that you serve in your practice.

References

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