

Media Release:

# **Alzheimer's disease... it's more than you think First wave of baby boomers turning 65 not ready for Alzheimer's**

## **Alzheimer Society survey reveals alarming knowledge gap**

*Canadians can test their own knowledge at [www.alzheimer.ca/testyourknowledge](http://www.alzheimer.ca/testyourknowledge)*

**Toronto, ON, January 4, 2011** – An online survey of baby boomers across Canada conducted by the Alzheimer Society reveals a worrying lack of awareness about Alzheimer's disease.

Survey results show that an astonishing 23 per cent of boomers can't name any of the early signs of Alzheimer's disease, even though their risk doubles every five years after age 65.

Of those surveyed, 50 per cent identified memory loss as a key symptom, but failed to mention other critical signs.

"Boomers are their own best detectors of Alzheimer's," says Mary Schulz, National Director of Education at the Alzheimer Society. "This is an insidious disease. Most people associate memory loss with Alzheimer's but it's so much more. Sudden changes in mood, misplacing common household items (like keys in the refrigerator), repeating words or statements or difficulty with everyday tasks like getting dressed can all be warning signs that need to be discussed with a doctor."

Most boomers are familiar with the common hallmark of Alzheimer's disease of not recognizing familiar faces and objects. But less than half know about life-altering changes, such as hallucinations or total dependency on others for basic care, that occur in the disease's later stages. More troubling, respondents are unaware that diabetes, obesity, heart disease and chronic depression significantly increase their odds for developing the disease.

Today's findings confirm a disturbing lack of knowledge about Alzheimer's disease among boomers, the country's largest demographic group, who will become increasingly at risk as they age. But the reasons for self-awareness and prevention have never been more compelling. Without a cure or drugs to stop the disease, Alzheimer's is destined to be the most pressing and costly health issue boomers will face in their lifetime: either they will get the disease themselves or be faced with caring for someone with the disease.

In Judy Southon's case, it might have saved her a lot of anguish. The 63-year-old former school teacher and business owner was blindsided four years ago when her husband Vic, an electrician, was diagnosed with both Alzheimer's disease and vascular dementia. "I started noticing he was having trouble fixing ordinary things and using a drill. He couldn't follow instructions, use his cell phone or handle money; he couldn't even tell time. I was traumatized. The grief never goes away, but the more you know about this disease, the better you'll cope and plan ahead and make the most of each day. It's important that people really understand and be aware of the signs." At 74, Vic is now in the last stages of the disease and is being cared for in a long-term care facility.

During Alzheimer Awareness Month, the Alzheimer Society is asking Canadians to test their own knowledge by taking the survey at [www.alzheimer.ca/testyourknowledge](http://www.alzheimer.ca/testyourknowledge). The Society also urges Canadians, especially those 40 and older, to practice prevention by learning the risks and making simple lifestyle changes: eat a heart-healthy diet, stay active, exercise regularly, maintain a healthy weight and monitor their blood pressure and cholesterol levels.

*This year's campaign is made possible in part through an unrestricted educational grant by Pfizer Canada.*

### **About Alzheimer's disease**

Alzheimer's disease is the leading form of dementia. It is a fatal progressive disease of the brain that robs memory and steals the ability to reason, communicate and perform daily tasks. Changes in the brain can begin to appear decades before diagnosis and progression can last between seven and 10 years. Eventually, the person affected will require 24-hour care and supervision. Age is the single biggest risk factor but the disease can also strike as early as 40.

### **About the survey**

More than 1,000 Canadians aged 45 to 65 completed the survey in July 2010. Men and women were split evenly. Of those surveyed, 37 per cent had some personal connection to the disease. None were affiliated with the Alzheimer Society in any way, nor have they or a family member donated to or used any of the Society's programs and services. Boomers were tested in three areas: early signs of Alzheimer's disease (unaided and aided awareness); later-stage symptoms (aided), and key risk factors (aided). To read the results, visit [www.alzheimer.ca/testyourknowledge](http://www.alzheimer.ca/testyourknowledge)

### **About the Alzheimer Society**

The Alzheimer Society is the leading nationwide health organization for people affected by Alzheimer's disease and related dementias in Canada. The Society is a principal funder of Alzheimer research and training, provides enhanced care and support to people with the disease, their families and their caregivers, and is a prominent voice within all levels of government. [Active in more than 150 communities across Canada](#), the Society is also a founding and key member of [Alzheimer's Disease International](#) (ADI), an organization at the forefront of global efforts to fight dementia.

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#### **Local Contact**

#### **National Contact**

Rosanne Meandro  
Senior Marketing and Communications Officer  
Alzheimer Society of Canada  
Office: 416-847-8920  
Cell: 416-389-1570  
1-800-616-8816  
[rmeandro@alzheimeront.org](mailto:rmeandro@alzheimeront.org)