

Dementia cases in Malta projected to almost triple by 2060, updated study finds

Malta is expected to have 21,523 dementia cases by 2060 if current trends persist



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The number of people living with dementia in Malta is expected to almost triple over the next four decades, according to an updated study that outlines significant demographic, regional and economic implications for the country.

The research estimates that 7,988 people were living with dementia in 2021, equivalent to 1.5% of the population, and forecasts an increase to 21,523 cases by 2060.

The study published in the Malta Medical Journal and authored by Anthony Scerri and Charles Scerri, provides the most detailed assessment to date of dementia prevalence in Malta, incorporating data from the 2021 Census and applying age-and-sex-specific prevalence rates published by the World Health Organisation for the European region.

Using Eurostat's latest long-term population projections, the authors produced updated estimates for the coming decades, showing significantly higher future numbers than earlier forecasts.

For the first time, the study also identifies the number of non-Maltese residents with dementia. It reports that 422 people in 2021—5.3% of all persons with dementia—were non-Maltese citizens. This reflects the country's rapid demographic change: by 2021, 22.2% of Malta's total population was non-Maltese, compared with just 4.4% a decade earlier. The authors note that as Malta's foreign-born population continues to grow, dementia services will need to adapt to increasingly diverse linguistic and cultural needs.

The study highlights distinct geographic differences. In 2021, the Northern Harbour district accounted for the largest share of dementia cases (29%) in absolute terms. However, when measured as a proportion of each district's population, the Southern Harbour district had the highest relative prevalence. The authors argue that understanding these

district-level variations is important for planning community services and allocating resources.

The economic implications are significant. The total cost of dementia in 2021 was estimated between €220 million and €260 million, encompassing formal healthcare, social care and informal care. The study does not publish projected future costs, but notes that expenditure is expected to rise substantially in line with the projected increase in cases.

The demographic shifts underlying these projections are also detailed in the study. According to the 2021 Census, 24.8% of Malta's population—128,930 people—were aged 60 or over, underscoring the impact of population ageing. The age-dependency ratio rose from 23.7 in 2011 to 27.6 in 2021, although it remains below the EU average due to the influx of younger non-Maltese workers.

The authors note that earlier Maltese and international estimates relied on population models that did not anticipate Malta's rapid population expansion. For example, Alzheimer Europe's estimate of 14,117 dementia cases by 2050 and the Global Burden of Disease estimate of 11,674 were based on projected population totals far lower than those produced by Eurostat's current models.

Under the updated projections, the number of dementia cases in 2060 is expected to be more than 1.5 times higher than previously forecast. Still the authors acknowledge that a large portion of non-EU citizens tend to move back to their country of origin and are then replaced by other young working migrants.

The report concludes that Malta will need to expand its health and social care capacity to meet rising demand in the coming decades. It also stresses the importance of public health measures aimed at reducing modifiable dementia risk factors, including hypertension, obesity, smoking, diabetes, depression, physical inactivity, social isolation and hearing loss.

Evidence cited in the study suggests that addressing these factors across the lifespan could reduce future dementia prevalence by up to 40%.

The authors state that the updated estimates are intended to support long-term planning and help policymakers prepare for the scale of future needs as Malta's population continues to grow and age.