



Linking generations

DEMENTIA CARE

This evidence theme on intergenerational programs is a summary of one of the key topics identified by a scoping review of dementia research.

Key points

- Intergenerational programs are social engagement strategies that aim to increase interaction, cooperation, and exchange among individuals from two or more generations.
- Evidence from one systematic review showed that intergenerational programs can improve pleasure and reduce disengagement among people living with dementia.
- Studies that assessed the relationship between intergenerational programs and quality of life and depression found no benefit.

What are intergenerational programs?

Intergenerational programs are social engagement strategies that aim to increase interaction, cooperation, and exchange among individuals from two or more generations. [1] When working with older people, the other generation often includes children but may also include younger adults. Programs vary in what they involve. They might include arts, music, singing, gardening, or information and communication technology. Participation in these programs is thought to bring physical and mental benefits to people living with dementia. [2]

Are intergenerational programs effective?

We found one systematic review examining the relationship between intergenerational programs and outcomes for people living with dementia. Some studies in this review reported benefits, including an increase in the level of pleasure experienced by people with dementia and decreased disengagement. [2]

There was no clear evidence of benefit for:

- Quality of life (relates to levels of physiological, psychological, social, and emotional wellbeing) [2]
- Depression. [2]

In other words, studies have assessed the relationship between intergenerational programs and these outcomes, but no benefit was found.

Evidence limitations

From our search, only one systematic review was found that focused on intergenerational programs. Therefore, conclusions drawn from this review should be interpreted with caution. Furthermore, the review highlighted some concerns about how these studies were conducted such as:

- Studies were only conducted in residential settings. [2]
- Potentially important outcomes were not assessed (e.g., cognitive function, medication use, medical care). [2]

What can an individual do?

- Be familiar with intergenerational programs and the potential benefits and limitations for people living with dementia.
- Be aware that not all people living with dementia will experience pleasure from social activities. [2]
- Consider watching the ABC program Old People's Home for 4 Year Olds.
- Refer concerns about persons living with dementia who may be at risk of social isolation to your line manager.

What can the organisation do?

- Consider starting an intergenerational program that persons living with dementia may opt-in to (e.g., with a local kindergarten, childcare, early learning centre, or university researching intergenerational programs).
- Be aware that not all people living with dementia will experience pleasure from social activities. [2]

References

1. Kaplan M, Sánchez M. Intergenerational programs and policies in aging societies. International handbook on ageing and public policy: Edward Elgar Publishing; 2014.
2. Lu LC, Lan SH, Hsieh YP, Lan SJ. Effectiveness of intergenerational participation on residents with dementia: A systematic review and meta-analysis. Nurs. 2021;22:22.

Cite as: ARIIA Knowledge & Implementation Hub. Linking generations: Dementia care. Evidence Theme. Adelaide, SA: ARIIA; 2022 [updated 2023 Jul].

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