

# Registered Dietitians' Perspectives Providing Care to Persons Living with Dementia in the Community: Preliminary Findings from an Online Questionnaire

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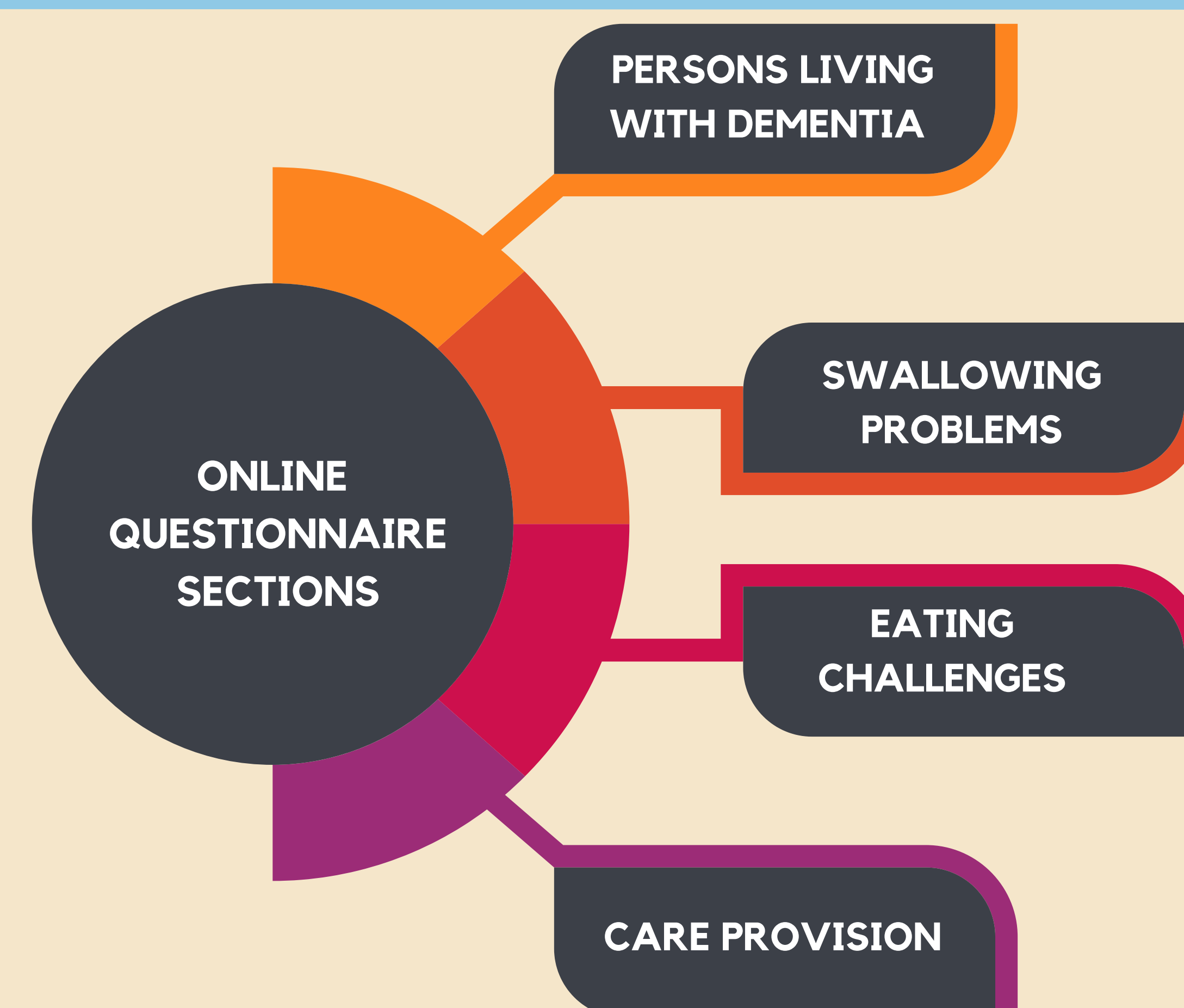
## Background

- Dementia impacts the ability of those affected to meet their nutritional needs due to changes in memory, function, smell, taste, appetite, and swallowing and eating capacity, which increases their risk of malnutrition<sup>1,2</sup>.
- Malnutrition can lead to negative outcomes such as frailty, osteoporosis, lower quality of life, and increased risk of morbidity and mortality<sup>3</sup>.
- Registered dietitians (RDs) are considered nutrition experts who play an integral role in preventing and treating malnutrition<sup>4</sup>.
- Limited research is available about the role of dietitians in assessing swallowing problems (i.e., dysphagia) and eating challenges among persons living with dementia in the community.

**The aim of this study is to examine the perspectives and experiences of primary care dietitians providing care to persons living with dementia in the community.**

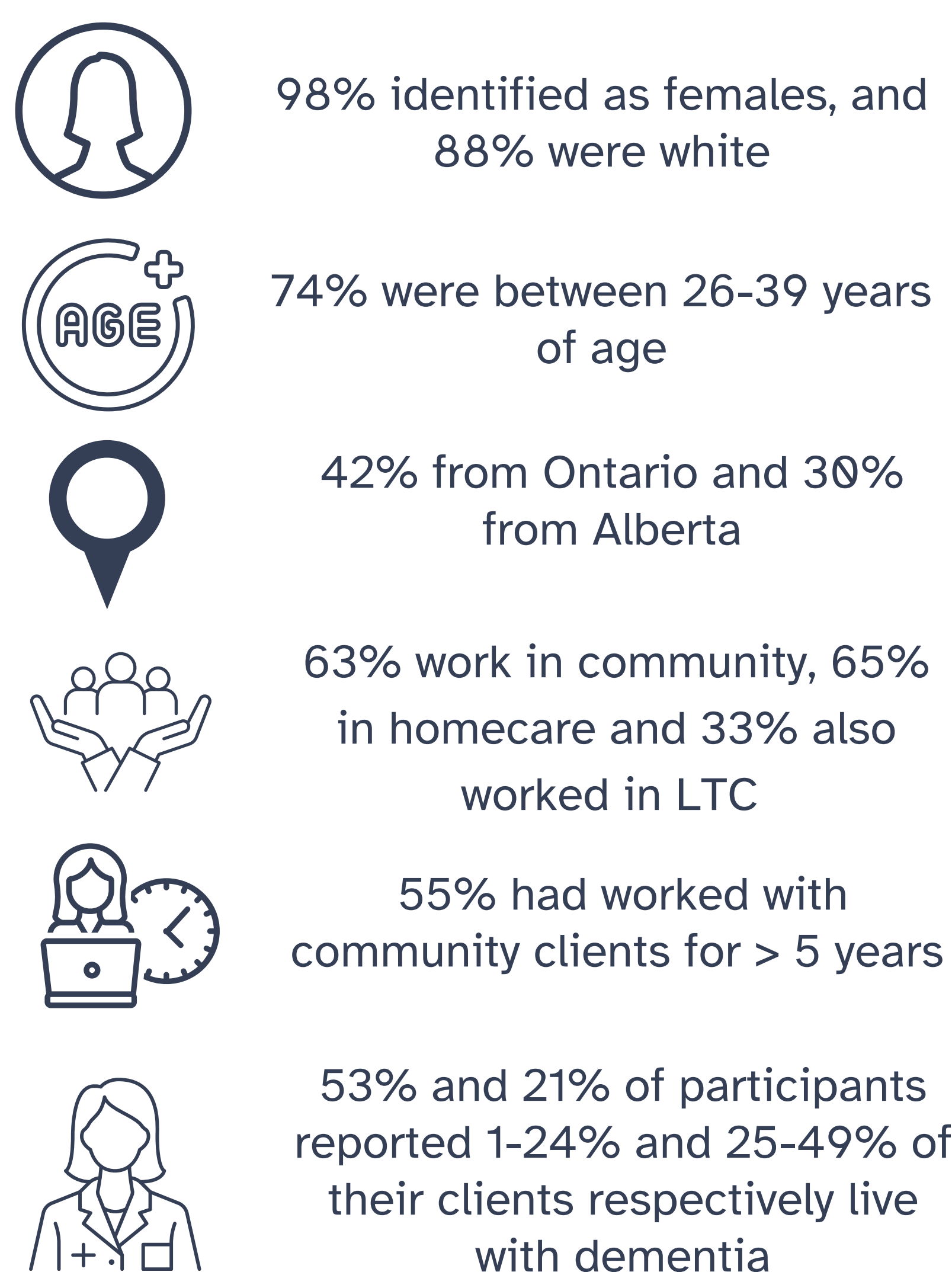
## Methods

- Mixed-method research design is utilized to understand the perspective of dietitians.
- Inclusion criteria: primary care dietitians (e.g., private practice, community care, outpatient clinic).
- Exclusion criteria: dietitians working exclusively in acute, complex, and long-term care (LTC) settings.
- Snowball and convenient sampling methods were used to recruit dietitians. RDs were recruited via social media, stakeholders organizations (e.g., Primary Care Dietitian Association and Dietitians of Canada Gerontology Network), and through conferences and workshops relevant to their practice.
- Phase one: an online questionnaire was conducted with dietitians between February-May, 2023. At the end, participants were asked if they would be interested in an interview- **Complete**.
- Descriptive statistics and associations with dietitians' confidence levels in providing care to clients with dementia were examined.
- Phase two: semi-structured interviews with registered dietitians who expressed interest- **In progress**.



## Preliminary Results

**A total of 47 dietitians responded to the survey\***



**RDs' confidence level in providing care to persons living with dementia (n=45)**

Not Confident	Somewhat Confident	Confident
6.7% (n=3)	53% (n=24)	40% (n=18)

**Reasons for dietitian referrals for persons living with dementia in the community (n=45)**

Unintentional weight loss 91% (n=41)	Chronic disease management 64% (n=29)
Eating challenges 76% (n=34)	Unintentional weight gain 13% (n=6)
Swallowing problems 73% (n=33)	Other (e.g., food security) 24% (n=11)

**Factors associated with RDs' confidence levels in providing care (n=45)\*\***

Working in LTC was associated with greater confidence in providing care to persons living with dementia (p=0.041)
Lack of dementia-related preparation was associated with lower confidence in providing care (p=0.011)
Dementia-specific professional training is associated with greater confidence in providing care (p=0.004)

**Barriers to providing care to persons living with dementia in the community (n=45)**

69%	Person living with dementia and/or family caregiver unable to follow recommendations (n=31)
58%	Lack of educational resources designed for persons living with dementia (n=26)
53%	Lack of dementia-related preparation received as part of professional training (n=24)
33%	Other (e.g., lack of support services available in the community) (n=15)
24%	Insufficient time for assessment or follow-up with clients (n=11)

**Supports to providing care to persons living with dementia in the community (n=45)**

80%	Working as part of an allied healthcare team (n=36)
47%	Dementia-specific professional training (n=21)
44%	Working in other practice settings (e.g., LTC, or complex care) (n=20)
33%	Having a mentor or dietitian support group (n=15)
18%	Other (e.g., resources designed for dementia clients) (n=8)

\*The number of answers varied per question.

\*\*P-value <0.05 determined statistical significance.

## Conclusion

- Understanding the perspectives of dietitians on barriers to care can inform knowledge translation efforts and care practices, enhancing the nutritional health of persons living with dementia in the community.
- LTC experience, dementia-related training, and lack of dementia preparedness are factors associated with dietitians' confidence in providing care to persons with dementia in the community. This highlights the need for hands-on experience and dementia education as part of RDs' professional training to support practice.

### References:

1- Volkert et al. 2015. Clin Nutr. 2015; 38 (1), 10-47. 3- Dent et al. 2023. Lancet. 2023; 401(10380):951-966. Prepared for Canadian Association on Gerontology (CAG), October 2023. © 2023. All rights reserved. Copyright rests with the author. 2- Volkert et al. 2019. Gerontol. Geriatr. Med. 2019; 5, 1-8. 4- Fleurke et al. 2020. Nutr Diet. 2020; 77(1), 60-75. No part of this abstract/poster may be reproduced without written permission from the author.

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# Memory Problems and Eating Challenges: Perspectives of Persons Living with Memory Problems and their Caregivers

**Professor Heather Keller (University of Waterloo) and student Hana Dakkak are conducting interviews with persons living with dementia or mild cognitive impairment in the community and/or their caregivers.**

*Our aim is to understand the experiences of persons living with a diagnosed memory problem and how they and their caregivers manage eating challenges such as swallowing difficulties.*

## **The voluntary interview will ask about:**

- Any current or past eating challenges experienced by persons living with dementia.
- Strategies that you know about or have used to manage eating challenges.
- What would help to manage eating challenges and swallowing difficulties better.

We are interested in hearing from caregivers and persons living with diagnosed memory problem, who live in the community. The Interviews will be conducted in person, or by telephone/ Zoom and will be audio-recorded with your consent. Interviews will be conducted in English and will take 30-60 minutes.



**Want to Participate?**

**Please email**

**hdakkak@uwaterloo.ca to schedule your interview**

**Have any questions?**

**Please contact Hana Dakkak at:**

**hdakkak@uwaterloo.ca or 519-888-4567 ext. 31783**

**This study has been reviewed and received ethics clearance through a University of Waterloo Research Ethics Committee (ORE#44681).**