

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

Jan. 4, 2012

## ***Let's Face It B.C.* Campaign Promotes Alzheimer Awareness**

Almost half of all Canadians with dementia delay diagnosis, survey finds

**Province-wide** – Survey results revealed today by the Alzheimer Society of Canada show a treatment gap has emerged for Canadians living with Alzheimer's disease and other dementias. Low rates of awareness for the early signs of dementia prevent many people from seeking a diagnosis early in the stages of the disease, when they might otherwise access medical treatment and support. The survey results indicate that almost half of respondents (44 per cent) waited at least a year to see a doctor because they thought their symptoms were simply "old age."

### National survey findings:

- Almost half (44 per cent) of respondents waited a year before seeing a doctor because they thought their symptoms were just the signs of old age
- 39 per cent thought their symptoms were episodic and didn't take them seriously enough
- Three quarters of respondents wish they had known sooner (for earlier access to treatments that may minimize symptoms, better understand what was happening as the disease progressed, and have more time to prepare for the future)

### B.C. survey of 400 caregivers of persons with dementia:

- 45 per cent noticed symptoms of dementia in their family member or friend between 3 to more than 5 years before seeking a diagnosis
- 57 per cent of caregivers felt they (or their family member or friend) were reluctant to seek a diagnosis because they either thought the symptoms were part of normal aging, didn't want to talk about it with anybody, they didn't want to see their doctor, or they didn't think anything could be done about it anyway
- 42 per cent of caregivers surveyed were prompted to see a doctor because the symptoms had become obvious to family and friends and were affecting day-to-day life
- In 58 per cent of responses, it was the family caregiver who initiated making the appointment to see a doctor for a diagnosis

“Alzheimer’s disease is now among the top 10 leading causes of death in Canada,” says Jean Blake, CEO, Alzheimer Society of B.C. “Early detection and diagnosis is critical to ensuring proper support, care and treatment of the illness. These latest findings tell us we have more work to do for the public to recognize symptoms of dementia and also to see their doctor right away if they have concerns about memory loss.”

In addition to accessing education and information resources to better understand the symptoms being experienced and the changes that can be expected, individuals with a diagnosis of dementia can explore treatment options earlier in the progression of the disease and begin to develop support networks.

The opportunity to plan ahead also allows families to make key financial and care decisions while the person with dementia is still functioning at the highest possible level.

In order to help raise awareness and encourage individuals concerned about memory loss to seek diagnosis from their doctors, the Alzheimer Society of B.C. has launched [www.letsfaceitbc.ca](http://www.letsfaceitbc.ca). During January, Alzheimer Awareness Month, visitors can:

- Experience day-to-day life from the perspective of Jim Mann, a person in the early stages of Alzheimer’s disease, via the *In Jim’s Shoes* daily posts (also available on Twitter at @AlzheimerBC or search #injimsshoes)
- Access information about warning signs and preparing for a diagnosis
- Find and reach out to their local MLA to encourage the government to support the expansion of First Link<sup>®</sup>
- Find a local Alzheimer Society of B.C. Resource Centre for information, education, and support

-30-

### **About the Alzheimer Society of B.C.**

The Alzheimer Society of B.C. provides a province-wide network of support, education, and information resources for families impacted by dementia. The Society is a non-profit organization that also advocates for better dementia health care and raises money to fund research and ensure there is Help for Today. *Hope for Tomorrow...*<sup>®</sup>

### **Media contact:**

Ruby Ng, Director of Marketing & Communications

Phone: 604-742-4919 | Cell: 604-828-9516 | E-mail: [rng@alzheimerbc.org](mailto:rng@alzheimerbc.org)

Web: [www.letsfaceitbc.ca](http://www.letsfaceitbc.ca) | [www.alzheimerbc.org](http://www.alzheimerbc.org)