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## Abstracts

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**A combined cognitive and exercise program for older adults with mild cognitive impairment: preliminary findings**

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**Background:** Fourteen percent of people with mild cognitive impairment may progress to dementia. Dementia is a leading cause of disability worldwide including Australia, meaning effective interventions are urgently needed to prevent or slow the progression of the disease and its overall burden to the person, community and health services. This pilot-study aimed to identify the feasibility and acceptability of a combined cognitive and functional-task based exercise program to delay the onset of dementia in people with mild cognitive impairment.

**Method:** A mixed methods approach was used. Individual interviews were conducted with caregivers and participants of the ten-week intervention program. Quantitative data included cognitive and functional assessments performed pre- and post-intervention such as Neurobehavioral Cognitive Status Examination, Verbal Fluency Test, Verbal Learning Test, Trial Making Test A and B, Lawton Instrumental Activities of Daily Living Scale and Problems in Everyday Living Test.

**Results:** Approximately 80% of the 23 participants completed the program demonstrating its acceptability. Interim results show significant improvements in several cognitive and functional areas. The improvements demonstrate the combined cognitive and exercise program is beneficial for people at risk of dementia. The qualitative findings suggest the program is viewed positively by participants and caregivers. Benefits described by the participants are evident through occupational performance e.g. developing strategies to remember tasks such as taking medication.

**Conclusion:** The combined cognitive and exercise program is acceptable and feasible. However, identifying people with mild cognitive impairment needs substantial research to develop sustainable pathways in primary care in Australia.