



Dementia epidemic looming

THE Government needs to act now to prevent a crisis of care for people living with dementia in New Zealand, says Alzheimers New Zealand.

The organisation has released a report, Economic Impact of Dementia in New Zealand, which was lauded by Dr Bryan Bang as the first comprehensive research to produce robust data on the prevalence and incidence of dementia, the health system costs, the burden of disease and the cost benefits of delaying institutional care.

Dr Bang, who chairs Alzheimers NZ, says the report shows the number of people living with dementia is much higher than previously estimated.

The report estimates in 2008 there are an estimated 40,746 New Zealanders with dementia. Of these, 12,333 were newly diagnosed this year.

Alzheimers spokeswoman Joy Simpson says the report confirmed what had long been suspected.

“We have always thought the numbers were higher than our estimates.”

However, she warns this is just the tip of the iceberg and New Zealand is potentially facing a dementia epidemic.

“By 2026, the number of New Zealanders with dementia is projected to increase to 74,821. By 2050, there will be 146,699 people with dementia.”

“In the year 2050, more people will be diagnosed with dementia than the total number of people with dementia in 2000,” Ms Simpson says.

However, Dr Bang says it's not all bad news. “We do have the capacity to improve things.

“Alzheimers New Zealand believes the country is well placed to deal with the increasing incidence of dementia as long as appropriate levels of funding and resourcing are put in place.”

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