



Report warns of dementia epidemic

WELLINGTON: The Government needs to act now to prevent a crisis of care for dementia sufferers, says Alzheimers New Zealand.

The organisation yesterday revealed the results of a study showing that the country was facing a dementia epidemic.

Chairman Dr Bryan Bang said the research — Economic Impact of Dementia in New Zealand (2008) — was the first piece of 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.

The study was part funded by the Alzheimers New Zealand Charitable Trust and the Ministry of Health.

Dr Bang said the report showed that the number of people living with dementia was much higher than previously estimated.

The report estimated that in

The projections

New Zealanders with dementia. —	
2008:	40,746
2026:	74,821.
2050:	146,699.

2008 there were 40,746 New Zealanders with dementia. Of these, 12,333 were newly diagnosed in 2008.

“We have always thought the numbers were higher than our estimates and the report now confirms this,” Alzheimers New Zealand immediate past chairwoman Joy Simpson said.

However, she warned that the numbers were just the tip of the iceberg and that New Zealand faced a potential 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,” she said.

“In the year 2050, more people will be diagnosed with dementia than the total number of people

with dementia in 2008.”

However, Dr Bang said it was not all bad news.

Alzheimers New Zealand believed the country was well placed to deal with the increasing incidence of dementia as long as appropriate levels of funding and resourcing were put in place.

“New Zealanders are innovative in their thinking and this will help us come up with the range of options needed to provide appropriate services for people living with dementia — from diagnosis through to residential care,” Dr Bang said.

“The fact is that most of the care is already happening in the community, not in care facilities and this has huge implications for carers and families.

“The cost benefits of supporting people and delaying institutionalisation speak for themselves, but we need to have appropriate funding and resourcing in place to support these families.” — NZPA