



Dementia cost passes \$700m

Dementia affects about 41,000 people in New Zealand and the progressive brain disorder will cost the country more than \$700 million this year in healthcare and lost productivity, new research shows.

The report, issued by Alzheimers NZ last night, says millions of dollars could be saved and sufferers' lives improved with earlier diagnosis and better access to medicines and community care.

Alzheimers NZ chairman Bryan Bang said the study, "The economic impact of dementia in New Zealand", was the first comprehensive research done on the incidence of dementia and its costs. It showed the number of people living with dementia was much higher than previously estimated and was projected to more than triple by 2050 to 146,699.

Total health spending on dementia this year is set to hit \$435.7 million, mainly for residential care and hospital stays. Lost productivity is estimated at \$132.5 million. People with dementia die at about twice the rate of others in their age group.

Family carers also cut down on paid work, potentially costing the country \$29.3 million.

However, the biggest impact is on quality of life. In 2008, 27,449 years of healthy life will be lost in New Zealand to dementia. The Wednesday, 23 July 2008, p. 26

report says early access to affordable medication is a main constraint. "Yet there are approved drugs as yet unlisted by Pharmac which are effective in slowing progression in early stages, enabling people with dementia to stay productive longer, plan their affairs and have higher quality of life."

Pharmac acting chief executive Steffan Crausaz said the Government's drug-buying agency was "really interested" in the report. In 2004 it declined funding for four medicines, donepezil, rivastigmine, galantamine and memantine approved for the treatment of alzheimer's, concluding there was very limited benefit across the population. "We need to go through the report carefully and see if there is any new evidence around the effectiveness and cost-effectiveness of those treatments," Mr Crausaz said last night.

New Zealand's spending on dementia research lags behind that of other Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development countries, at just \$70 per person with dementia per year, compared with \$400 per person in the US.

Dr Bang noted the net benefit from delaying the entry of people with dementia into residential care by three months could save \$30.5 million a year.

— The Dominion Post