

Policy statement to Alzheimers NZ 2017

The Green Party is also acutely aware that over the past nine years the Government has under-funded health services by hundreds of millions of dollars, eroding the capacity and quality of many services, including home-based support, respite and day-support services. We are committed to ensuring that health sector funding keeps pace with increasing health need, and in particular to increasing the resources for the community-based services that will enable more people living with dementia to remain living at home, if them and their family that is the best option.

As our population ages and dementia rates rise, it is imperative that our health system is ready to cope. This necessitates clear treatment pathways, qualified health professionals at all levels, from GPs looking out for symptoms to specialist tertiary services to quality end-of-life care, and the necessary resources to cope. The Green Party believes that anticipating health problems early helps us take responsibility for them in the long term and preserve the quality of people's lives.

Internationally, the Green Party is committed to New Zealand being an active member of the Global Alzheimer's and Dementia Alliance. The New Zealand Framework for Dementia Care in 2013 has been useful for GPs and DHBs and for engaging Alzheimers NZ. The Green Party would explore the possibility of having greater specialist knowledge within the Ministry of Health. With the current demographics of an aging population, it is important that there is enough attention and resources going into neurological conditions. New Zealand's rate of funding for dementia research is comparatively low internationally. The Greens understand that money put into prevention and delaying of chronic disease is usually more cost-effective than treatment in the long term.

The Green Party acknowledges that the stigma associated with dementia frequently discourages sufferers and/or their families from obtaining an early diagnosis and seeking help. Ageism also plays a role in reinforcing the stigma associated with dementia. The Greens acknowledge the success of de-stigmatisation programmes such as *Like Minds Like Mine*, and in Government will support a similar programme targeted at destigmatising dementia.

The Green Party supports people with dementia and their families having choice over how they are cared for, including the choice to be cared for at home by a family member. In many cases this is the best way for people with dementia to continue to lead an active social life and be in contact with their loved ones.

The Greens consider the National-led Government's Carer Payments scheme for family carers to be discrimination. It is a disincentive for many people with dementia and their families to take up the home care option. The Greens are committed to urgently reviewing the scheme with regard to eligibility for entitlement, equity of payment and access to judicial process by those dissatisfied with entitlement decisions to ensure that home care is a viable option for all people with dementia that do not need the specialist hospital services that only residential aged care can provide.

The Green Party will raise the minimum wage to \$17.75 in the first year and keep raising it until it's 66 percent of the average wage. Such an increase will help improve staff retention in aged residential care, and thereby the quality of care that residents receive. The Greens

recognise that the aged care sector does not have the capacity to meet this increase in the minimum wage without reducing staffing levels and compromising standards of care. This is particularly a problem for not-for-profit providers of aged care in small towns and rural areas.

We are therefore committed to increasing Government funding to the aged care sector to ensure that standards of care in aged care facilities are maintained or improved as aged care workers are transitioned to a living wage. The Green Party is also committed to seeing women more fairly paid for their work, and are delighted that Kristine Bartlett and the unions have finally seen a pay rise. This will help the sector overall.

The Green Party affirms that caring for disabled or chronically ill family members, including those with dementia, is work, irrespective of whether the carer is paid. All New Zealanders deserve to have a work-life balance and to be able to take some time off from work, paid or unpaid, to relax and pursue their own personal interests. The Greens therefore support reviewing the respite care policy to remove barriers to uptake of respite care.

The Green Party will lift the quality of care and support for people affected by dementia by supporting tools such as InterRAI across the whole of the aged care sector. The Greens in Government will commit to funding the rollout and ongoing costs of InterRAI in the aged residential care sector on the same basis as it is funded in the community aged care sector. We will also ensure that the assessments are consistently undertaken across DHBs and that needed levels of care are adequately funded

The Green Party is committed to implementing the 2012 recommendations of the Human Rights Commission in its report *Caring counts: Report of the Inquiry into the Aged Care Workforce*, including those relating to staff qualifications, safety standards, and consumer information for residential care facilities. This report drew on our earlier 2010 inquiry into Aged Care, together with the Labour Party and Grey Power. We have recently undertaken a follow up inquiry and will soon publish the results. The recommendations are likely to support the points above.