



Dementia: An urgent and rapidly escalating health priority

Dementia¹ is one of the 21st century's greatest health challenges. There is no treatment or cure, and none is currently on the horizon.²

- The number of New Zealanders with dementia grew by 29% between 2011 and 2016.
- That number is estimated to be growing by over 3,200 people per year on average and will exceed 170,000 New Zealanders by 2050.³
- Dementia cost Vote Health \$1.7 billion in 2016. That cost is likely to reach around/almost \$5 billion by 2050.
- Costs increased by 75% between 2011 and 2016.
- Between now and 2040, economic costs of dementia are likely to increase at an average rate of over \$250,000 per day (\$2016).
- Dementia-associated health and social care costs almost match the combined costs of cancer, heart disease and stroke.

Everyone is affected

The current services for people with dementia and their care partners are woefully inadequate and Government must act. We have an ageing population and the sheer numbers of people aged 65+ means dementia is an obvious issue affecting our entire population. For example:

Dementia impacts on the wider health system

- Care of older people is likely to account for 50% of DHB expenditure by 2025/26 (almost 20% increase since 2015/16). Dementia is associated with failed discharges, medication harm and acute hospital presentations. Dementia is the main reason people enter aged care.

¹ Alzheimer's NZ produces dementia friendly documents which is why we use size 14 font.

² The *Lancet* "Commission on Dementia"; led by Professor Gill Livingston with contributions Claudia Cooper, Sergi Costafreda, Jonathan Huntley, Rob Howard, Naaheed Mukadam, Vasiliki Orgeta, Liz Sampson and Andrew Sommerlad, (2017).

³ Alzheimer's NZ, (2017) *Dementia Economic Impact Report* (DIER) (research conducted by Deloitte)

There is little assistance to live well

- New Zealand has no risk reduction plan to lower the incidence of dementia.
- There is little post-diagnosis assistance.
- There is no approach to counter life and role-limiting stigma.
- Any 'push' for dementia/age friendly communities and serious measures to help people to live well is lacking.
- People often do not know what services are available or how to access them.
- NGO-led living well programmes have limited capacity and even fewer resources.

Inadequate services are causing unnecessary harm

- Services are often of poor and/or of inconsistent quality and are largely limited to medical solutions and disability support.
- People report being poorly served by GPs and hospitals.
- Workforce capacity is poor.
- There is an urgent need for synergy between the palliative care and dementia sectors.

Care partners are struggling

- Care partners may be young or have both young children and elderly parents. They often leave jobs and significant roles in order to care.
- Respite care is limited and inflexible adding to care partner stress.
- Around 55% of family/whānau care partners report feeling overwhelmed.
- An estimated 40% having clinically significant depression or anxiety adding to our already over-burdened mental health sector.

There is a major equity issue

- Māori, Pacific peoples, cultural minorities, young onset people, people with disabilities, and people living in rural areas face inequitable services.
- Dementia services are based on a lack of data and vary according to DHB boundaries.

Dementia: The Six Steps Solution

We are keen to work with Government to improve people's lives. Key organisations in the sector are collectively working on a national dementia action plan consistent with the *WHO Global Action Plan on the Public Health Response to Dementia*. The Six Steps Solution that will make a difference include:

1. **Invest in prevention and risk reduction** - Proactive evidence-based interventions focussed on modifiable risk factors could reduce the risk of developing dementia and/or slow progression by between 10% and 20%.
2. **Improved detection, diagnosis and support** - These improvements, via primary care services, will help people deal with the diagnosis and get suitable help earlier. They would also help the health system to be more sustainable across the generations.
3. **Support for people to live well** - People's lives will be improved by services which help them to live better at home, such as at least 12 months post-diagnostic support and navigation services.
4. **Support family carers to continue to provide care** - Ensuring the existence of flexible, high quality, consistent respite services which meet specific regional needs will help care partners to get the breaks they need and so assist them to continue in their caring roles.
5. **Build age and dementia friendly communities** – These just make sense given our changing demographics. They enable us all to participate and continue to be engaged in meaningful activities and roles. They are also vital for countering life-destroying stigma and discrimination - much needed for increasing older people's participation in the labour force.
6. **Establish indicators and monitor progress** – Right now we are struggling with a lack of data. Indicators and progress monitors make measurement possible, provide access to knowledge and a foundation for policy. Essentially, what gets measured, gets done!

Alzheimers NZ

Alzheimers NZ⁴ is a strong community organisation working at a national level to represent people living with dementia. It was established in 1986. Our focus is building a dementia friendly New Zealand by raising awareness of dementia, providing information and resources, advocating for high quality services, and promoting research. Our patron is distinguished Professor Sir Richard Faull.

Local Alzheimers organisations provide support, education, information and related services directly to members of their communities who are affected by dementia.

Although we are strong, we are small. We do have knowledge and experience and help people as much as we can. Alzheimers NZ has many successes, and we work with governments of all shades. However, our resources are limited, and we do not create public policy. We are dependent on you, our politicians, to create the settings which can make a real difference.

⁴Alzheimers NZ, can be contacted at Level 4 West Block, Education House, 178-182 Willis Street, Wellington PO Box 11 288, Manners Street, Wellington 6142 **Phone** 04 387 8264 **Website** www.alzheimers.org.nz, **Email:** policy@alzheimers.org.nz