



## **Submission: Initial Mental Health and Wellbeing Commission - He Ara Oranga wellbeing outcomes framework**

### **Introduction**

Thank you for the opportunity to comment on He Ara Oranga wellbeing outcomes framework. Alzheimers NZ has a strong interest in this area as mental health and wellbeing is highly significant for the community we represent.

### **Alzheimers NZ**

Our organisation was established in 1986 and is the lead organisation at a national level representing people living with dementia. Our role includes raising awareness of dementia, providing information and resources, advocating for high quality services, providing practical tools to support a dementia friendly New Zealand, and promoting research. We support local Alzheimers NZ organisations throughout New Zealand, each of which is a member of Alzheimers NZ.

The local Alzheimers organisations provide support and related services directly to members of their communities who are affected by dementia. These services include support for family/whanāu and coping with the demands of caring; support groups and day programmes for people affected by dementia.

Alzheimers NZ puts people living with dementia at the heart of everything we do. We have an Advisory Group of people who either have dementia or are care partners who help us make sure this occurs. We are hoping that the mental health and wellbeing of our community will be enhanced by the work of the Commission.

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## **Dementia, mental health and mental wellbeing**

Numbers of people living with dementia (that is those who have dementia and their care partners) are growing rapidly. Currently there are around 70,000 New Zealanders who have dementia (care partners are not included in this total), and this number is expected to triple in coming years as our population ages. Age is the key correlate of dementia.

Mental health and wellbeing are critical issues for this community. People who have dementia frequently develop depression and /or anxiety. Dementia can cause changes in relationships, stress, loneliness, lost careers, and reduced income, putting a strain on both physical and mental health. People caring for those with dementia often ignore their own health needs in favour of the person for whom they care. Around 40% of family/whānau dementia care partners have clinically significant depression or anxiety (*Lancet*, Commission on Dementia, 2017, p.38).

The dementia sector has worked hard to get improved policies around dementia. Politicians at our recent [election forum](#) agreed something needs to be done, but there has been a lack of action so far.

In the last year, the sector became so desperate it developed its own [dementia action plan](#). Much of the focus of the plan is to improve the wellbeing of those living with dementia. It includes many areas which are associated with mental wellbeing – such as dementia friendly environments, policies, and health services; human rights; improved autonomy; and, the ability to meet the needs of Māori peoples. Other areas of wellbeing are also included, and the plan clearly identifies what needs to happen – it just needs to be implemented.

## **He Ara Oranga wellbeing outcomes framework**

### *Support for the Mental Health and Wellbeing Commission and its work*

Alzheimers NZ needs the Mental Health and Wellbeing Commission to operate well. Our community is dependent on it. For this reason, we are keen for the Commission to have outcomes document which works as well as possible.

We support the Commission's work. Flourishing together is what we all want. We do want to be safe, healthy, resilient, hopeful, be connected and belong, and all those other outcomes.

### *Opportunity to inspire*

There is an opportunity here – to set out Aotearoa-specific outcomes in a way in which inspires and unites us all. The Mental Health and Wellbeing Commission’s outcomes document should be able to use fewer words to champion the vision and key outcomes in a way which is simple and understandable, and also demonstrates a commitment to an Aotearoa where everyone can flourish mentally. For Alzheimers NZ’s population, that means at least being able to read the document.

### *A mental wellbeing friendly document*

The Commission has the prospect of demonstrating its commitment to mental health and wellbeing by having a mental wellbeing friendly document. The document as written is too dense and difficult to read. The font is too small, and the layout is unnecessarily complex. The outcomes document needs to be unambiguous and readily understandable.

### *Alzheimers NZ interest in measurement*

Alzheimers NZ recognises there is much work to be done following release of the outcomes document. We have a strong interest in the measurement of wellbeing. We also have a strong interest in the [determinants of mental health and wellbeing](#) which underpin the attainment of wellbeing. People need to be [able to stay well, get well, and remain well](#) in the presence or absence of mental illness and have access to quality services which help them to do so.

### *A bicultural approach and its overlaps*

Of course, the outcomes document needs to work for both Māori and the population as a whole. The current approach is overly complicated and clumsy. The task may be made easier by some overlaps which are more obvious than first apparent. For example, in the dementia community wairua is important as people’s inherent humanity is all that is left when everything else is gone. As the [Dementia Declaration](#) states: ‘I am still me’.

### **Conclusion**

Alzheimers NZ appreciates there is a major challenge ahead in supporting the mental health and wellbeing of everyone in Aotearoa. Ensuring that people can maximise their wellbeing and are supported to be as well as possible is

crucial for our organisation. We wish the Mental Health and Wellbeing Commission well with its work and look forward to being of further assistance should the opportunity arise.

*Ahakoā te momo mate, whakanuia tangata*

*Regardless of illness or disease, people deserve dignity and respect and the opportunity to become well again*