

2022 Alzheimers Disease International Conference – New horizons in dementia: Building on hope



The Conference

The 35th Conference of Alzheimers Disease International was held as a hybrid event (in person and online) over three full days from 9 to 11 June 2022 and attracted 1,200 participants from 120 countries (with equal numbers in person and online).

Delegates consisted of people living with dementia, family carers, staff and volunteers of Alzheimer organisations, providers, researchers, healthcare professionals and representatives from international organisations and institutions.

The Conference was structured around the World Health Organization's Global Action Plan on Dementia. There was a diverse range of international keynote speakers delivering plenary sessions for each of the seven action areas of the plan: increased dementia policy, awareness, risk reduction, diagnosis, treatment, care and support, support for carers, information systems and research. Additional sessions were also added around 'Coping during a crisis' which saw an important discussion of lived experiences from Ukraine and Indonesia.

This report synthesizes the Alzheimers NZ delegation's experience into the key highlights and takeaways.

Overall, the Conference offered a stronger focus on lived experiences than previous events, a strong message of optimism about what is possible with the right government support, and another interesting evidence-based research programme. It confirmed the value of the objectives and the actions in the Dementia Mate Wareware Action Plan.

Conference Highlights and Takeaways

- Dementia is a big challenge and growing fast – globally there are now more people over 65 than under five and dementia and in particular Alzheimer’s disease is rapidly overtaking other chronic diseases as the most prevalent and most feared.
- Dementia is a human rights issue – people are being denied choice, support and treatment by inadequate and poorly supported services and a lack of government priority.
- Joint effort makes a difference but much more is needed from governments to meet the 2025 deadline for the Global Action Plan (New Zealand has adopted this as a member of the World Health Assembly).
- Diagnosis remains critical – both to help people come to terms with the changes they are experiencing and to access help and support – but is denied too many people with rates of diagnosis estimated globally at as little as 20% and in New Zealand at best 50%.
- The experience of dementia and the journey is different for everyone so all care and support must be tailored and person-centred – and meaningful engagement in the later stages of the condition is as important to personhood and wellbeing as in the early stages.
- More effort is needed to involve people living with dementia in policy, planning, service development and evaluation, and design of the environment.
- Post-diagnostic support is critical to supporting people to live their best possible lives, supporting carers, and avoiding unnecessary burdens on health services.
- There is a growing body of useful material available to share with people living with dementia and providers including a number of new websites and apps that could be adapted for use in Aotearoa NZ.
- There was a strong message of hope and optimism running through the content from the Wembley Stadium Dementia Friendly project to immediate post-diagnostic peer support in Japan, to research into biomarkers, therapeutic interventions, and precision medicine.

- Awareness and understanding remain low and need more focus
- Research remains strong globally with a particular focus on risk reduction, diagnosis, post-diagnostic support, gut health, and the impact of inflammatory factors.
- Practical support and help were a focus, including on difficult topics such as sexuality, continence, and psychosocial support post-diagnosis.
- The cost of care falls mainly on families.

The full programme is available [here](#).

Learnings

The content was offered live on UK time which added some challenges for those in distant time zones. As a result, we watched most content on demand and were unable to participate in the networking in the online chat room which operated during UK office hours.

The online platform was fairly easy to use although there was some delay in content being available and some were not available or accessible.

Some presenters made little effort to make sure their presentation and slides were dementia friendly which was disappointing.

Alzheimers NZ Delegation

The Alzheimers NZ delegation comprised Clare Hynd (Chair), Alister Robertson (Person with Dementia) (Board member), Lyneta Russell (Principal Advisor), and Catherine Hall (CE).

Our delegation presented two papers at the Conference:

1. Alister Robertson - Development of an app to provide a digital platform to record "My Life's Journey"
2. Catherine Hall - Improving dementia services in Aotearoa New Zealand

August 2022