

Election briefing 2023

Government action needed for
dementia mate wareware crisis



Aotearoa New Zealand faces a national crisis in dementia care: Government action is needed urgently

Government must act urgently to address Aotearoa New Zealand's national crisis in dementia care. This crisis has two pinch points:

1. The rapidly growing number of New Zealanders being diagnosed with dementia care.
2. The woefully inadequate funding provided to community support services for people living with the condition.

170,000 Kiwis will live with dementia care in 2050. The condition will cost the country almost \$6 billion a year and hit Māori, Pacific, and Asian communities hardest.

But, while dementia care prevalence is increasing quickly, fewer than 11 per cent of New Zealanders living with it currently receive the support they desperately need. Nearly 30,000 Kiwis with this condition must fend for themselves because local Alzheimers and Dementia care organisations have reached a tipping point. If left unchecked, this will only get worse, causing significant problems for the health system and creating major health equity issues.

“ ... we know that we could be doing more, we know we could be doing better, and we know we could be reaching further but at the moment we're doing the best we can. We're spreading the margarine on the toast as thin as we can to cover as many slices of bread as we can ... but we could be doing a lot more.”

Manager, Alzheimers South Canterbury

Alzheimers NZ's 2023 election priorities

Ahead of the 2023 election, we urge the incoming government to commit to making it a national health priority by:

- **Implementing and funding the [Dementia Mate Wareware Action Plan](#).** This will help reduce the incidence of dementia mate wareware among New Zealanders, while providing better support for those with the condition.
- **Providing an immediate injection of an extra \$9 million per year to remedy the urgent funding pressures in community-based dementia mate wareware organisations and ensure that their services remain viable.** Many of these services cannot cope with current demand and are on the brink of financial collapse. This funding will help them to continue providing quality services for people with dementia mate wareware.



Progress has been made but there is still a lot more to do

The current government has made some progress in recent years to address the dementia challenge.

Cabinet endorsed the Dementia Mate Wareware Action Plan in November 2021. The government also used Budget 2022 to establish the Dementia Mate Wareware Leadership and Advisory Group - Te Whakaruruhau mō te Mate Wareware, and to commit \$12 million over four years to fund four post-diagnostic support trials, dementia navigators and respite for carers.

These are positive steps and provide a very valuable platform, but much more still needs to be done.

The Dementia Mate Wareware Action Plan needs to be fully implemented in order to limit dementia mate wareware prevalence and improve care and support. Commitment, without implementation, is window-dressing.

The Budget funding does not fix the critical financial pressures faced by community-based dementia mate wareware services. The immediate investment of an extra \$9 million per year is in no way a sustainable solution

for the sector, but it will help these services to continue operating and supporting more people who desperately need help.

Continued government inaction on dementia care will be costly

There are serious human consequences:

- Nearly 30,000 New Zealanders living with dementia care cannot access essential support because local community services cannot cope with current demand. More people with dementia care will miss out as the prevalence grows.
- Continued lack of support for New Zealanders with dementia care will only exacerbate the existing inequity issues faced by this community.
- Family and whānau are struggling and overwhelmed. They face significant financial impact from the increased cost of living, including the cost of health and social care.
- Human rights are ignored or overlooked. Stigma and discrimination create barriers accessing services and support.

And there are major fiscal costs:

- Dementia care is one of the 21st century's greatest health challenges and a massively expensive health condition. It costs Aotearoa New Zealand around \$2.5 billion per year in 2020; this will nearly triple to around \$6 billion by 2050.
- Dementia care has major impacts on the wider health system. People with the condition are likely to experience a faster decline of their cognitive function, more acute events and admissions to secondary services, increased lengths of stay, failed discharges, increased need for aged residential care and for higher levels of that care, and health system harms, especially falls and medication harms.



The impact of the recent natural disaster

For people with dementia mate wareware, natural disasters can be confusing and distressing, and add significantly more anxiety to an already stressful health situation.

As an example, [people with dementia whose homes were damaged](#) are likely to experience more severe declines in cognitive functioning as a result.

The recent Cyclone Gabrielle and the flooding in Auckland have also totally disrupted the community-based dementia mate wareware services that so many Kiwis living with this condition rely on every day. Those services, which were already underfunded and under extreme pressure, provide a much-needed source of local support to some of our most vulnerable citizens.

But many communities are struggling to maintain those services and the pressure on them has now been ramped up exponentially.

This makes the case for government funding support even more urgent.

It is going to be a long road to recovery for many communities. For the dementia community that road will be tougher than most. Direct government support for the local services will make a massive difference.

Alzheimers NZ calls for urgent government action to better support the dementia mate wareware sector

There is no treatment or cure for dementia mate wareware.

The condition is such a global health threat, the World Health Organization produced a report urging governments around the world to have a plan for dealing with it.

Alzheimers NZ asks the incoming government to heed that call to better support the struggling and under-pressure dementia mate wareware sector.

Government needs to act, and act quickly. Otherwise, dementia mate wareware will overwhelm the health system and prevent future governments from addressing other priorities.



Appendix 1: Who is Alzheimers NZ?

Alzheimers NZ is the lead organisation at a national level representing people and whānau living with dementia mate wareware.

People living with dementia mate wareware are at the centre of everything we do – our work is shaped by [the Dementia Declaration](#) and advice from the Alzheimers NZ Advisory Group.

Our role includes raising awareness of dementia mate wareware, providing information and resources, advocating for high quality services, providing practical tools to support a dementia mate wareware friendly Aotearoa New Zealand, and promoting research.

Alzheimers NZ was established in 1986. We support local Alzheimers NZ organisations throughout Aotearoa New Zealand, each of which is a member of Alzheimers NZ.

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

These services include but are not limited to:

- Information and education to assist with understanding and living with a dementia mate wareware diagnosis.
- Support for whānau and friends coping with the demands of caring.
- Support groups and day programmes for people affected by dementia mate wareware.

We can't do it alone

Partnership is at the heart of everything we do. We're members of:

- New Zealand Carers' Alliance (Chief Executive Catherine Hall is Co-Chair)
- Neurological Alliance (Chief Executive Catherine Hall is Chair)
- Health Coalition Aotearoa
- Federation of Primary Health
- New Zealand Coalition to End Loneliness (founding members)



A dementia friendly New Zealand Aotearoa

He aro nui ki te hunga mate wareware

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This document is produced in a dementia mate wareware friendly style.
It uses fonts and spacings that makes it as easy as possible for people with
dementia mate wareware.