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Strategy Group
Ministry of Health
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Tēnā koutou

Alzheimers New Zealand welcomes the opportunity to provide feedback on the proposed Long-term Insights Briefing topic of 'unlocking the potential of active ageing.'

Alzheimers NZ is a lead organisation at a national level representing people and their families 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 NZ, and promoting research.

Our responses are outlined below.

1. Do you think 'active ageing' is a critical topic to explore in a Long-term Insights Briefing? Why or why not?

Alzheimers New Zealand agrees that 'active ageing' is an important topic of the Ministry of Health's Long-term Insight Briefing. For older people to continue contributing to society through work, volunteering and caregiving, for as long as possible, it is essential that they remain healthy, engaged and active.

Older people make invaluable contributions to society and the economy through their skills, knowledge and caregiving, yet they often face neglect and require urgent policy actions to address the barriers they encounter. For instance, the increasing number of older people and people with dementia is surpassing the available resources and creating significant gaps that need immediate attention.

Because New Zealand has an ageing population and ageing is the most significant risk factor for dementia, the number of New Zealanders living with dementia is growing faster. In 2020, approximately 70,000 New Zealanders lived with dementia and this number is expected to [rise by 240 per cent](#), to 170,000 people by 2050.

The numbers will increase at a faster rate among Māori, Pacific Peoples, and Asian communities because these populations are ageing at a faster rate than the general population. Because [social disadvantage and poverty](#) are significant risk factors for dementia, Māori and Pacific Peoples are also disproportionately affected by this health condition.

Dementia is a major cause of disability and loss of independence among older people, affecting memory, cognitive abilities, and behaviour. Dementia is not a normal part of ageing and there is no treatment or cure for it. Women are also disproportionately affected by dementia.

Dementia often goes undiagnosed, unreported and is associated with increased mortality. In 2020, 27.8 per cent of people who died in New Zealand had a diagnosis of dementia at the time of death, with 9.4 per cent of total deaths having dementia reported as the primary cause of death.

Dementia cost New Zealand \$2.5 billion per year in 2020, and this figure is projected to rise to [\\$6 billion per year by 2050](#). Despite the growing number of people with dementia, community-based services cannot meet the growing demand for services, leaving around 30,000 people with dementia without adequate support, and as many as 36,500 people who have not been formally diagnosed. The [Dementia Mate Wareware Action Plan 2020-2025](#) has been developed to drive the changes needed to address this challenge and improve the health, independence, and quality of life of people living with dementia in a sustainable way.

Addressing issues such as healthcare access and social inclusion are important for supporting older people particularly those living with dementia. It helps reduce the risks of isolation and inequities which can delay cognitive decline and the onset of dementia. Policymakers can create strategies that not only improve the quality of life for older people but also benefit society as a whole by leveraging their skills, knowledge, and contributions. This will help ensure that the growing demand for health and social services is met with sustainable and effective solutions.

2. What are the main risks of not further enabling ‘active ageing’ over the next 20 years?

1. Loss of valuable contributions and weakened community resilience

As the proportion of older people and people with dementia increases, failing to support active ageing initiatives would diminish contributions to society and add cost to community and the economy.

2. Healthcare services under pressure and rising costs

Older people are the biggest users of the health and aged care systems. Many of them face health challenges including chronic illnesses, dementia and complex conditions. Without support, they will face earlier health decline and contribute to increased demand for healthcare and long-term care services, often at higher levels of support.

The Dementia Mate Wareware Action Plan and its four objectives will support people with dementia and reduce its impact the health system and the economy, as well as meet New Zealand’s obligations under the WHO Assembly's [Global Action Plan on the Public Health Response to Dementia 2017-2025](#). Investing in active ageing initiatives to help older people live well in their communities for as long as possible will reduce pressure on healthcare services and decrease costs in the health sector.

3. Decreased health and quality of life of older people

Without support for active ageing, older people and people with dementia will not be able to continue their participation in the community and their quality of life will be adversely impacted. For instance:

- Poorly designed homes can increase dependence on healthcare and caregiving, and limited transportation options can reduce mobility, particularly for older people in rural areas, to access essential services. This can lead to increase social isolation, which is evidenced to worsen cognitive decline and mental health outcomes.
- Social barriers such as stigma around ageing and dementia, language barriers, mistreatment, cultural beliefs perpetuate inequities, inequality and exclusion.

4. Workforce shortages and the loss of financial independence

Active ageing policies will enable older people to remain longer in the workforce. It will help prevent workforce shortages, allow services to meet demands and grow, and benefit the economy. Enabling older people to engage in meaningful employment will also support their financial independence, maintain social engagement and reduce isolation.

5. Missed opportunities for intergenerational benefits

Enabling active ageing will support relationships between generations and increase opportunities for knowledge transfer and social cohesion.

3. What health-promoting and supportive environments would better enable 'active ageing'?

Recommendations that will further support active ageing for older people and people with dementia include:

1. Funding for community-based services

Providing adequate funding for community-based services will help them meet the existing and growing demand for services as our population ages. It will also allow these services to provide culturally appropriate services for tangata whenua and other population groups. From dementia perspective, funding and implementing the Dementia Mate Wareware Action Plan will potentially reduce the incidence of and support those affected by this health condition.

2. Age and dementia friendly communities

Creating age and dementia friendly communities will promote inclusion and support active ageing. Raising awareness of the benefits that older people bring to the communities and to the economy will help reduce stigma in communities, promote understanding, and create an environment where older people feel valued and supported.

3. Access to appropriate support including dementia services

Having access to well-resourced community-based dementia services will enable older people and people with dementia to remain active and living in their communities for longer, and reducing the pressure on health services. The [Dementia Mate Wareware Action Plan](#) outlines actions to provide better care and support for people living with this health condition.

4. Healthcare innovations

Healthcare innovations, such as progress in [biomarkers in diagnosing and managing dementia](#), are offering new hope for older people. These treatments may provide better treatment options and potentially improve the quality of life for older people.

5. Connectivity and support

Access to technology and digital platforms allows older people to stay connected and help reduce social isolation, maintain cognitive function, and offer flexibility for engaging with communities, even when in-person participation is not possible.

4. What barriers to 'active ageing' do you see in our environment and society?

1. Broken health system

The current health system is not equipped to meet the needs of older people. Older people, especially those with a condition like dementia, are not a priority despite being the largest user of health services. These gaps and inequities exist, making it difficult for older people and their families to navigate healthcare services and timely support.

2. Limited and inadequate funding for services to support older people

Community-based services are a critical part in providing support for older people and people with dementia, but they struggle to deliver appropriate and timely services due to inadequate

funding and resources. Without sustained investment in these services, the potential benefits of older people supported by an active ageing strategy will not be met.

3. Limited access to dementia services

People with dementia are being let down by inadequate and inconsistent services. Access to, and availability of, services is inequitable particularly among Māori, Pacific Peoples, Asian, the Rainbow community and other disadvantaged populations. This disparity leaves many without the support they need to live meaningful lives and continue to contribute to their community.

4. Lack of prevention initiatives to reduce the risk of long-term health conditions

Population-based prevention initiatives, such as programmes to address [modifiable dementia risk factors](#) are missing from current health strategies. These gaps limit opportunities and potential to reduce the prevalence and impact of dementia and other long-term health conditions among older people.

5. Stigma and ageism

Older people and people with dementia often face stigma and discrimination, creating more barriers to participate in their communities and exercise their human rights. Ageism has particularly negative effects on the health and well-being of older people as [it can lead to psychological issues](#), such as depression and anxiety.

6. Accessibility issues to supportive environments

Inadequate transportation options and inaccessible public facilities create physical barriers for older people, reducing their mobility and preventing participation in community and recreational activities. For people with dementia, unclear signage and unsafe public spaces can be particularly challenging.

7. Economic inequities

Financial barriers prevent many older people from accessing healthcare, assistive technologies, and social activities. This is especially true for underserved populations such as Māori and Pacific Peoples, who may already face economic disadvantages that compound with age.

5. Areas of focus

Considering the list of potential focus areas below, do you think these focus areas are the most important for enabling or demonstrating the impact of ‘active ageing’? If not, what other areas would you propose?

1. Integrated care to improve health support and connectedness

An integration health and social care systems will help address the complex needs of older people. It provides seamless coordination between healthcare providers and makes it easier for older people, people with dementia and their families to navigate the health system and receive timely support. The [NZ Aged Care Commissioner’s report](#) highlights the need for better services for older people and their families.

2. Cross-sector collaboration

Cross-sector collaboration between government, private sector and community is a key to improving health and promoting active ageing. It can create smarter policies and efficient programmes that help older people live independently and healthier lives. Strengthening leadership and sector capability is one of actions in the Dementia Mate Wareware Action Plan aimed at ensuring consistent service delivery across the country.

3. Risk reduction

Proactive population-based prevention programmes should start in early life because healthy ageing and active living are long-term processes that do not develop overnight. By prioritising prevention, people will be better equipped to maintain a high quality of life and stay active as they age.

4. Equity

New Zealand's diverse population calls for policies that meet the needs of ethnic communities. There should be policies that promote health, well-being, and equal opportunities for active participation in social and economic life for all New Zealanders. Implementing the Dementia Mate Wareware Action Plan helps achieve equitable health outcomes for diverse communities, enabling them to take an active role in society.

5. Combatting ageism

Actions are needed to [eliminate ageism](#) through awareness, education, and providing information that drives change. A positive ageing strategy should incorporate strategies to reduce stigma against ageing and dementia.

6. Elder abuse prevention

Older people are susceptible to physical, emotional, or financial abuse, due to factors like dependency or isolation. Focusing on [preventing and responding to elder abuse](#) within supportive environments will help older people feel saved and valued.

7. Indicators and monitoring

Establishing indicators and monitoring frameworks should be created to assess the effectiveness of active ageing initiatives. Regular monitoring and reporting will assist policymakers to identify gaps, evaluate progress, and making evidence-based adjustments to improve outcomes over time.

Ngā mihi nui



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