



30 January 2025

Hon Simeon Brown
Minister of Health
Parliament Buildings
Wellington

Dear Minister

Mitigating the significant and growing impact of dementia on New Zealand's health system

Congratulations on your appointment as Minister of Health. This is a critically important portfolio that brings significant challenges and opportunities. As a long-time member of New Zealand's health sector, we welcome the opportunity to work with you to mitigate those challenges and leverage all possible opportunities.

Taking action now to tackle the rapid increase in New Zealand's dementia numbers will help facilitate both of the above.

Dementia is not a "me too", under-served clinical entity like any other. Rather, it is one of the most significant health challenges facing the country and an important hidden player in the pressure the health system is currently experiencing. It creates multiple impacts in the system, including:

- Lower thresholds for acute hospital presentations
- Increased lengths of stay
- Failed discharges
- Increased need for aged residential care and for higher levels of that care
- Significant health system harms, especially falls and medication harms.

Hospitals struggle to treat people with dementia who often emerge with worsened ability to function than when they were admitted and who are a significant driver of what is termed "blocked beds".

The rapidly increasing dementia prevalence is putting additional and unnecessary strain on our already struggling health system and costing the economy billions of dollars a year - \$2.4 billion currently, rising to almost \$6 billion by 2050 - some of which could be reprioritised as a result of carefully managed investment now.

None of this is a surprise, the health system has long been aware of New Zealand's ageing population and older people are the biggest users of the health and aged care systems. But to date, little has been done to mitigate these impacts and they will only get worse as our population continues to age rapidly.

While Health NZ has done work on the Aged Care Review nothing in that work yet addresses the significant challenge dementia presents to the health system and the economy.

The good news is that New Zealand can still avoid the very worst impacts of this dementia challenge with appropriate Government policy and funding.

There are two steps that should be taken now to address the growing dementia crisis and alleviate its impact on the health system.

The first step is for the Government to implement and fund the evidence-based [Dementia Mate Wareware Action Plan 2020-2025](#). The Action Plan has four objectives and a range of strategies and actions to:

- a. Reduce the number of people living with dementia in future
- b. Support people living with dementia and their families now
- c. Build accepting and understanding communities
- d. Strengthen leadership and capability across the sector.

The second step is for the Government to fairly fund community-based dementia services, based on the Business Case, 'Fair funding for community-based dementia services' we developed jointly with our partners Dementia NZ. We have provided this Business Case to Health NZ in 2023.

Taking these steps now, particularly the investment in community-based services and primary care, which is easily scalable as demand grows, will reduce pressure on our high-cost and struggling hospital services.

Investing in the Action Plan will send a strong signal of support to older New Zealanders, who will reach one million in just the next few years, and provide better and more equitable support for those living with dementia now. It will also reduce the number of people living with dementia in future, helping to reduce future costs to Government.

It should also be noted that this much-needed investment in the dementia sector can be handled progressively; building over a medium-term period, showing a commitment to older New Zealanders while also demonstrating prudent stewardship of public funds.

We would welcome the opportunity to discuss the way the Dementia Mate Wareware Action Plan can help you address the pressure in the health system. In the meantime, I have attached for your information copies of the joint briefing we and Dementia NZ provided to the new Ministers in late 2023 and the infographic from our joint Business Case. These

documents provide further information on the matters raised in this letter. Thank you again for your time and commitment to dementia.

Yours sincerely,



Clare Hynd
Chair, Alzheimers NZ Board

Copy to:

Hon. Casey Costello, Associate Minister of Health
Andy Inder, Director Health Ageing, Health New Zealand