



Alzheimers New Zealand

Alzheimers NZ position papers

Making dementia a priority

Alzheimers NZ is calling for dementia to be recognised as a national health priority that can no longer be ignored.

Ahead of the 2026 General Election, we're asking all political parties to act now, because dementia affects thousands of Kiwi families and needs to be a top health priority. Our message to all political parties is that tackling dementia now will deliver positive political and fiscal outcomes and benefit many thousands of Kiwi families.

To support our dementia advocacy, we've created three position papers that clearly explain our views and offer practical solutions to improve life for people with dementia and their families:

1. Progressively implement and fund the Dementia Mate Wareware Action Plan. This starts with three immediate actions that will relieve pressure on the hospital and wider health system, and reduce cost. Those actions are:
 - Ensure timely diagnosis and dementia management planning in the primary care system.
 - Ensure better support for the dementia workforce.
 - Invest in population brain health programmes which address the 14 modifiable risk factors for dementia and encourage healthy lifestyle choices to reduce the future number of people living with dementia.
2. Fund community-based dementia services appropriately to provide critical support for people living with dementia and their care partners/family.
3. Create and implement an older persons' health and aged care strategy based on an integrated continuum of care.

These position papers go with our [Speaking up for dementia - 10 key messages for change](#). Together, they help us speak about what needs to change. You can find our advocacy resources on [our website](#).

How to use them

Use the position papers and the 10 key messages when meeting with MPs, community groups, partner organisations, or speaking to the media or at events. You can choose the messages that best fit your audience and message.



Alzheimers New Zealand

Position paper

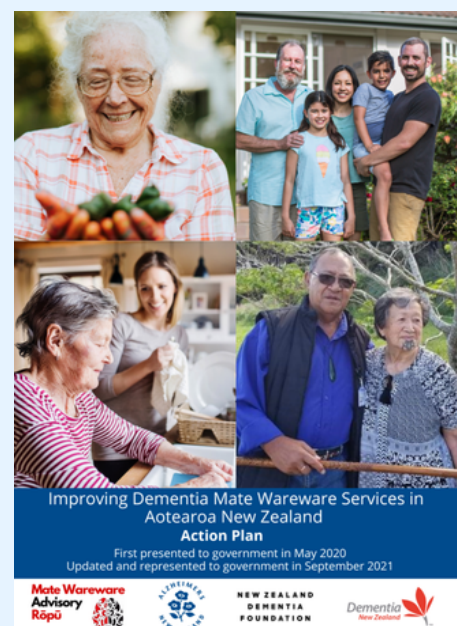
Progressively implement and fund the Dementia Mate Wareware Action Plan

Our position

Dementia is a health sector priority that is creating unsustainable pressure on the hospital and wider health system. It can no longer be ignored. Government can significantly relieve this pressure, and reduce health system costs, by progressively implementing and funding the Dementia Mate Wareware Action Plan, starting with three immediate priority actions:

- Ensure New Zealanders with dementia get a timely diagnosis and dementia management planning in the primary care system.
- Provide better support for the dementia workforce.
- Invest in population brain health programmes which address the 14 modifiable risk factors for dementia and encourage healthy lifestyle choices to help reduce the number of people living with dementia in future.

The Action Plan is focussed on everyone having equitable access to services, regardless of their age and cultural identity, or where they live.



The problem

New Zealand is facing a major and rapid growth in dementia numbers that is putting unrelenting and growing pressure on the country's fragile health system; it is already taking up much-needed and costly hospital and aged residential care beds and it costs New Zealand taxpayers billions of dollars a year – \$10 billion a year in inflation-adjusted costs by 2050¹, by which time we can expect a 240 per cent increase in dementia cases compared to an estimate of 70,000 in 2020.

The background

Around one million New Zealanders will be aged 65 years and over in 2028. With a rapidly aging population, the number of people living with dementia is also growing at an unprecedented rate. Approximately 170,000 people will live with dementia in 2050. Health inequities further complicate this picture; the number of people living with dementia will increase at a faster rate in Māori, Pacific Peoples, and Asian communities.

The solution

Progressively implementing and funding the Dementia Mate Wareware Action Plan, with a focus on those three priority actions, will help to:

- Deliver positive political/fiscal outcomes for Government
- Relieve pressure on the health system
- Reduce the number of people living with dementia
- Provide better and more equitable support for those with dementia now and benefit many thousands of Kiwi families
- Reduce the future cost of dementia to Government.

¹ Based on the [DEIR 2020](#) and assuming annual inflation of two per cent over the next 25 years



Alzheimers New Zealand

Position paper

Fund community-based dementia services appropriately

Our position

We urge the Government to invest a total of \$127.3 million in New Zealand's 17 Alzheimers and community-based dementia support services over three years so they can respond to the rapidly growing demand within their local communities. Funding community-based dementia services, which is also one of priority actions in the [Dementia Mate Wareware Action Plan](#), would relieve rapidly growing pressure on the more expensive health system.



The problem

The country's community-based dementia services provide critical support for people living with dementia and their care partners/family, but they can't cater to the existing demand we are experiencing now, never mind the 240 per cent increase in dementia cases New Zealand can expect by 2050, up from an estimate of 70,000 in 2020. The problem is chronic, long-term under-funding by successive Governments – one service in the Wairarapa receives no Government funding at all – and many of them are struggling to survive.

The background

Government funding for dementia support services only covers the operational cost to support a fraction (13 per cent) of the people living with dementia. As a result, some 37,600 people with dementia² can't get the community support they need because the community services are significantly under-resourced. Without this community support, families struggle, and carers experience increased stress and mental health challenges. If properly funded, these community services would cost just \$11.11 a day, are far cheaper than aged residential care or a hospital-level bed.

The solution

We urge Government to invest in our woefully under-funded community-based dementia services so they can meet the rapidly growing need and relieve significant and growing pressure on the much more expensive health system. It is estimated a total of \$127.3 million is needed over three years to support a new service model that allows these organisations to deliver early and ongoing support services to 37,400 families. This investment would help to free-up much-needed hospital and emergency department beds, and provide many thousands of New Zealanders with the care they desperately need.

² Of the 83,000 people estimated to have dementia in 2025, 11,000 (13 per cent) people receive services from local Alzheimers and Dementia organisations, 25,000 (30 per cent) are in residential care, and if 20 per cent are able to pay for their services and/or receive support from one of the pilot programs. This leaves an estimated 37,600 without support.



Alzheimers New Zealand

Position paper

Create and implement an older person's health strategy based on an integrated continuum of care

Our position

New Zealand needs a bespoke strategy to provide good quality, integrated and accessible services across the health and aged care continuum, from community services to the aged residential care and end-of-life sectors. This strategy needs:

- An independent, evidence-based pricing structure which covers the entire system.
- To be designed with sector involvement and support both providers and the workforce.
- An independent task force, with bipartisan political representation and sector input, to design, implement and monitor the impact of the changes that are needed in our aged care sector.



The problem

We don't have such a strategy. Which is problematic because by 2028, one in five New Zealanders will be aged 65 years or over, approximately one million people. And it's well known that older people are the biggest users of the health system, which can't cope as it is. It's certainly not geared-up or prepared for the significant extra demand New Zealand's aging population will create.

The background

Nearly three per cent of all New Zealanders will have dementia by 2050. In addition, we know the already fragile New Zealand health system will have to cope with higher rates of disability and long-term chronic health conditions that require support on a daily or regular basis. As our population ages, we can also expect increasing numbers of people to live longer with more complex conditions and comorbidities that require more specialised care and support. This becomes a major issue when key transition points for older people between the health and aged care sectors are totally disconnected. Even within the same sector, transition points are disjointed. It's therefore hugely hard to navigate the system and get the right care and support when you need it.

The solution

New Zealand needs to take a holistic view of the country's health and aged care systems. We must invest now in an integrated health and aged care strategy that is properly planned, managed and funded - reflecting the needs of all stakeholders - to ensure it is equitable and sustainable.