



Dementia Mate Wareware Action Plan

2026-2031

Mate Wareware

The authors adopted mate wareware as the preferred te reo Māori for dementia in 2020 based on the work of kaupapa Māori researchers (Dudley et al, 2019). Using this term recognises that dementia mate wareware is a health condition and not a normal part of ageing.

Dementia Friendly

This Action Plan uses a dementia friendly format including plain English and a minimum of size 14 font.

DRAFT

Foreword

This is the second Dementia Mate Wareware Action Plan we've written to better position the health system to meet the needs of growing numbers of New Zealanders living with dementia mate wareware.

The first Plan (2020 to 2025) was ambitious because dementia mate wareware is a big challenge to Aotearoa New Zealand. It provided a roadmap for government action to drive the changes needed across the dementia sector as a whole and was organised around four overarching objectives and 26 actions based on the evidence and accepted good practice. The Plan was informed by input from over 300 individuals and organisations from the sector.

The Plan was originally finalised and submitted to government in May 2020 and then updated a year later to strengthen its kaupapa Māori and equity provisions. The then government endorsed the Action Plan and in Budget 2022 allocated \$12m over four years to fund two new streams of work. The first to develop a governance ecosystem to oversee implementation of the Plan, and the second to establish seven pilots spanning post-diagnostic community-based navigation, support and respite services. An evaluation of the ecosystem and the pilot initiatives commenced in 2025 and is expected to inform future services.

Since the Action Plan was launched in 2020 it has gained wide recognition and acceptance. The body of knowledge about what works has also continued to grow and the sector has worked collaboratively in support of the direction set in the Plan. However, at the same time, it has become harder for people living with dementia mate wareware to get the help they need and the size and scale of the challenge dementia presents to Aotearoa New Zealand continues to grow.

Aotearoa New Zealand needs to keep building momentum with the implementation of the Plan so that the support needed for people living with dementia mate wareware is both accessible and appropriate for the diverse population groups living here. The ageing population and rapidly rising numbers of people with dementia mate wareware also make this an urgent

problem for government. In response, this refreshed Action Plan has a narrowed focus on five immediate priorities areas.

Dementia mate wareware is not a problem for the future the challenge is here now. The more that can be done to keep New Zealanders living with dementia mate wareware at home and independent for as long as possible and to support their whānau the better it will be for all.

Government now faces important choices about how to respond to the growing challenge of dementia mate wareware. The decisions made over the next few years will influence not only the wellbeing of individuals and whānau, but also the resilience of the health system and the strength of Aotearoa New Zealand's social and economic foundations.

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Plan at a glance

Vision

Dementia mate wareware is prevented as much as possible and people living with dementia mate wareware get the help and support they need.

Goal

Improve the wellbeing of people living with dementia mate wareware and decrease the impact of dementia mate wareware.

Priority actions



Taking action to promote brain health



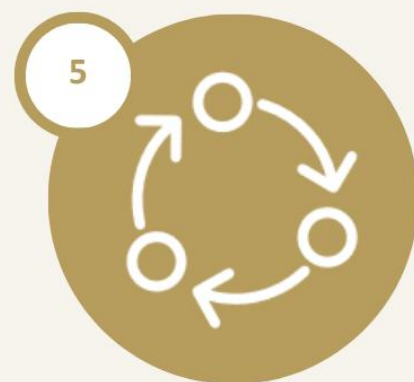
Timely and accurate diagnosis and comprehensive management plans for people and whānau living with dementia



Improved post-diagnostic support



Formal and informal workforces are supported



Effective governance

An Action Plan to Meet Future Need

This refreshed Action Plan 2026 to 2031 provides a roadmap for government action over the next five years.

This is not a new Plan. The work in the first Action Plan is not complete so this refreshed Plan prioritises and builds upon that first Plan.

The Context

Dementia mate wareware is one of the most significant challenges of our ageing population. It has a profound impact on individuals and their whānau, as well as the health system and the economy. Demand for services will continue to grow as the population ages.

The number of people with dementia mate wareware is projected to more than double, from [an estimated 83,000 to around 170,000 by 2050](#). Health inequities further complicate this picture with the number of people living with dementia projected to increase at a faster rate in Māori, Pacific Peoples, and Asian communities.

The economic cost of dementia mate wareware is also growing. Currently estimated at \$2.4 billion, this figure is expected to reach almost \$6 billion (in 2020 dollars) by 2050.

Ageing remains the most significant risk factor. By 2028, it is estimated that more than [one million New Zealanders will be aged 65 years and over](#).

Despite this, health system planning and investment have not kept pace. Services for older people, including those living with dementia mate wareware, are under strain, and current approaches are not sufficient to meet the scale of future demand – see Current Gaps and Challenges below for a brief summary of the gaps and pressures.

Current Gaps and Challenges

<p>Help is hard to get</p> <p>People living with dementia mate wareware struggle to get a diagnosis and to get the help and support they need</p> <p>Whānau struggle to get support and experience greater levels of depression and poorer health than the general population</p> <p>Stigma and discrimination continue to create barriers to accessing services and support.</p>	<p>There are gaps and issues across the system</p> <p>Gaps exist across the dementia mate wareware journey from diagnosis to end of life, with current estimates that as many as 50% of people do not have a diagnosis and a third cannot access community-based support.</p> <p>Access to, and availability of, services is inequitable for many including Māori, Pacific Peoples and Asian, people with young onset dementia, and those living in rural areas.</p> <p>Access is also variable across the country</p>
<p>Dementia has a significant impact on the health system</p> <p>It contributes to the pressure the system is experiencing by increasing emergency presentations, lengths of stay and health system harms (eg falls and medication, and repeat admissions.</p> <p>Acute hospitals often struggle to treat people with dementia mate wareware who can have general functioning decline while in hospital.</p>	<p>Community expectations are growing rapidly</p> <p>Decades of research are starting to show promise with disease modifying treatments and more accessible diagnostic tests closer than ever. We also know more about risk reduction than ever, but Aotearoa New Zealand's health system is not geared to respond.</p> <p>Workforce issues in the dementia sector also continue to worsen.</p>

Links to other Strategies/Plans

This Action Plan aligns with Pae Ora (Healthy Futures) Act 2022, the [Government Policy Statement on Health 2024 to 2027](#), and Te Pae Tata Interim Health Plan 2022 to 2024¹. Its implementation will help Government achieve its vision of longer life expectancy, improved quality of life for all New Zealanders and timely access to quality health care.

This Plan also has links to, and supports, other strategies and plans, including Better Later Life – [He Oranga Kaumātua 2019-2034](#) and the [Carers' Strategy 2008 and the Carers' Strategy Action Plan](#) (being refreshed in 2025).

Aotearoa New Zealand is not alone in facing this challenge. Funding the implementation of this Plan would meet Aotearoa New Zealand's international obligations under the [Global action plan on the public health response to dementia 2017 -2025²](#).

¹ The next, four-year, NZ Health Plan has yet to be released.

² In May 2025 the World Health Assembly agreed to extend the Global Action Plan for a further 6 years.

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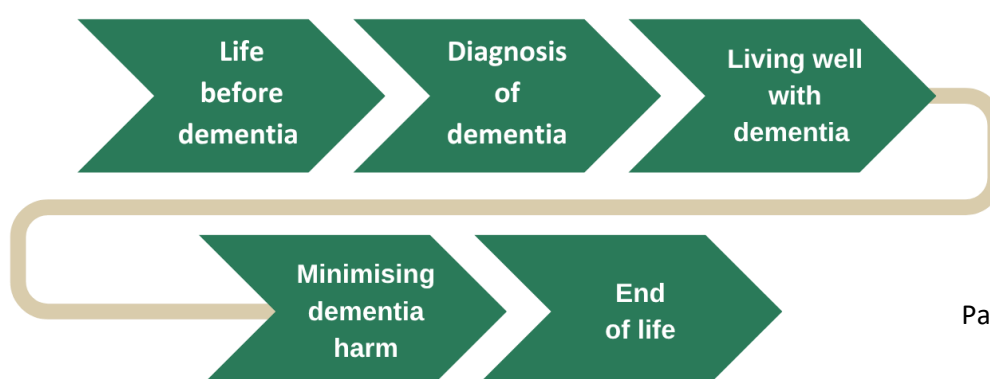
System enablers

The refreshed Action Plan relies on the wider health system operating in a way that is consistent with these principles:

- Supports the equal rights of all people living with dementia mate wareware, making sure they are valued and treated with dignity and respect
- Makes sure everyone with dementia mate wareware and their whānau can access services, no matter who they are or where they live or what age they are
- Services that get it right for Māori, Pacific Peoples, Asian, people with young onset dementia and those living in rural areas will get it right for everyone
- Provides services that are commissioned so that integrated primary, community and specialist services working collaborative are the backbone of support
- Supportive and inclusive communities challenge the stigma and discrimination associated with dementia mate wareware.

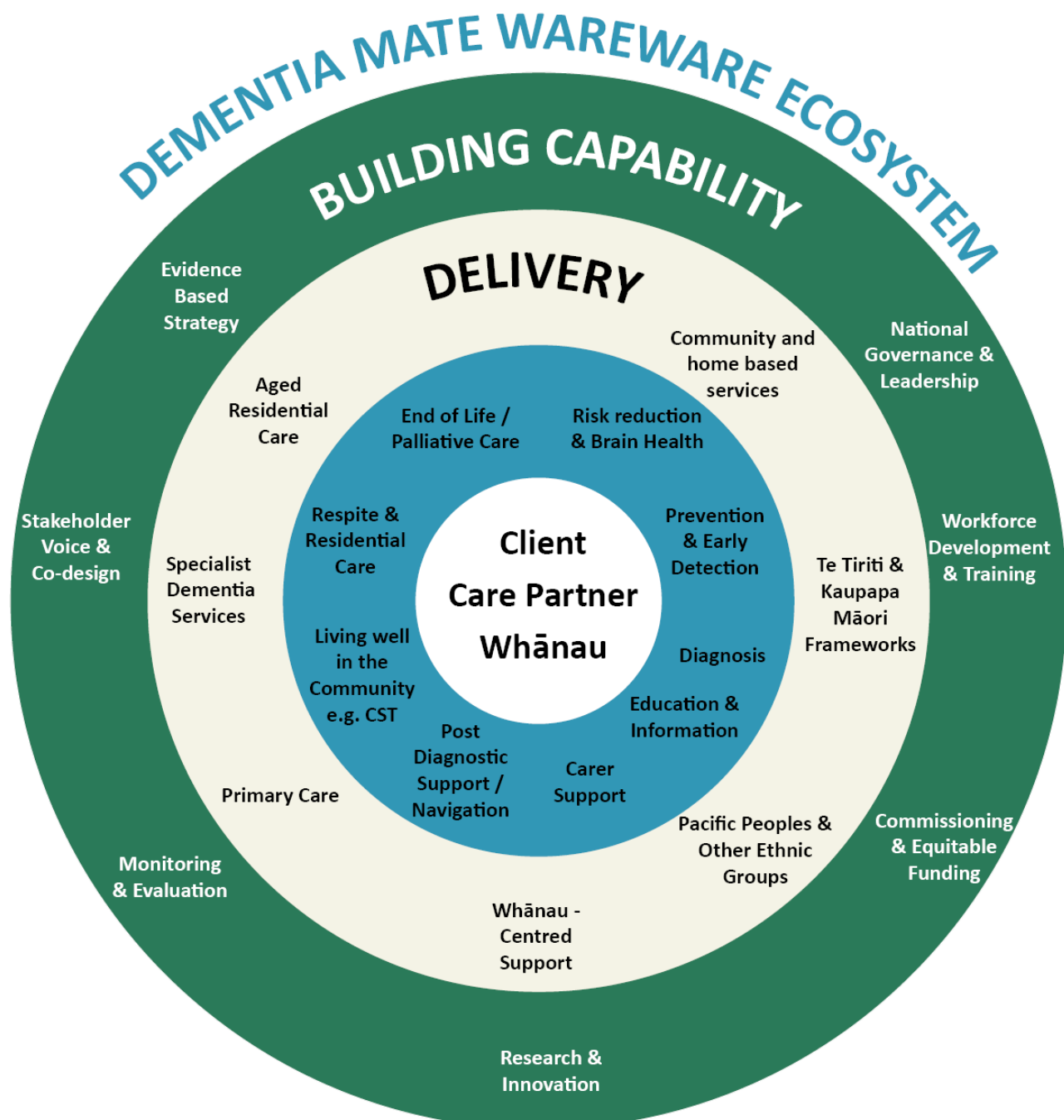
Scope

The Action Plan covers the whole of the dementia journey:



Dementia Ecosystem

The Plan encompasses a wide and complex environment with each part making a valuable contribution to a client, care partner and whānau-centred system as depicted in the following diagram.



Priority Actions

The authors support the four priority actions identified by the Leadership and Advisory Group and Dementia Network and have added a fifth to highlight the critical need for effective governance over this next period.

Taking action to promote brain health

Local and central governments will make decisions that help shape healthier environments by:

- reducing the key social drivers of poor brain health making it easier for people and whānau to make healthier choices

Health service and community capacity for informing and motivating individuals and whānau to make brain-healthy choices will be enhanced:

- for people across the whole lifespan
- with tailored solutions that meet the needs of different populations

Timely and accurate diagnosis and comprehensive management planning

Primary care services are supported by government and health agencies:

- Implementing the recommendations of the Dementia Mate Wareware Primary Care Working Group
- Facilitating consistent use of the national Cognitive Impairment Community Health Pathways
- Providing equitable access to a viable primary care sector



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Improved post-diagnostic support



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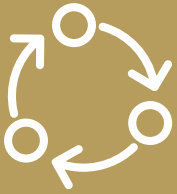
- Whānau and care partners supporting people living with dementia mate wareware, have their contribution recognised and supported, and their financial status better protected
- Accessible, reliable, culturally appropriate information will be available, including an emphasis on equipping care partners for their roles
- People and whānau living with dementia mate wareware will be able to receive at least 12 months of culturally appropriate post-diagnostic community services
- The service model described in “Community-based dementia services in Aotearoa New Zealand” will provide the minimum standard for the post-diagnostic community services provided in each health district

Formal and informal workforces are supported



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- Accessible, best-practice information and training will be available for health workers who work with people impacted by dementia mate wareware
- A Dementia Workforce Plan will be developed and implemented
- Pathways for accredited learning will be designed and implemented to benefit whānau and care partners who want their experience to be formally recognised



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Effective governance

- The National dementia mate wareware governance group will be structured and resourced to achieve the goals of the Action Plan in a nationally consistent way, including expert clinical governance, effective whānau and community voices, and input from people living with dementia mate wareware
- Outcome measures will be designed, tested, and adopted to assess progress towards achieving the goals of the Action Plan

Appendix 1 - What is this Plan based on?

This Plan is based on the information, evidence and research outlined in:

- *Convention on the Rights of Persons with a Disability (2008)*, United Nations
- *Aotearoa New Zealand Framework for Dementia Care (2013)*, Ministry of Health
- *Dementia Economic Impact Report (2021)*, University of Auckland for Alzheimers NZ
- *Dementia prevention, intervention, and care (2017)*, Lancet Commission
- *Differences in the potential for dementia prevention between major ethnic groups within one country: A cross-sectional analysis of population attributable fraction of potentially modifiable risk factors in New Zealand (2021)*, The Lancet Regional Health – Western Pacific
- *HAUORA: Report on Stage One of the Health Services and Outcomes Kaupapa Inquiry (2019)*, Ministry of Health
- *Whakamaui Māori Health Action plan 2020-2025 (2020)*, Ministry of Health
- *Mate Wareware: Understanding 'dementia' from a Māori perspective (2019)*, Dudley, M., Menzies, O., Elder, H., Nathan, L., Garrett, & Wilson, D.
- *Global Action Plan on the Public Health Response to Dementia (2017)*, World Health Organization
- *Care Needed: Improving the Lives of People with Dementia (2018)*, OECD
- *Dementia Declaration: Our Lives Matters (2019)*, Alzheimers NZ Advisory Group
- *This is our Story: A qualitative research report on living with dementia (2019)*, Litmus Research for Alzheimers NZ
- *Statistics NZ. Stats NZ official reports readily available online.*
- *Ma'u E, Cullum S, Mukadam N, Davis D, Rivera-Rodriguez C & Cheung G. Estimating the prevalence of dementia in New Zealand using capture-recapture analysis on routinely collected health data. (Under formal peer review for publication 2024)*

- *See also: Cheung G, To E, Rivera-Rodriguez C, Ma'u E, Chan A et al. (2022) Dementia prevalence estimation amongst the main ethnic groups in New Zealand: A population-based descriptive study of routinely collected health data. BMJ Open.*
- *Ma'u E, Cullum S, Cheung G. (2024) Navigating ethnic diversity: Rethinking dementia prevention in Aotearoa New Zealand. Aust NZ J Psychiat 58(5).*
- *Croucher M, Chamberlain M & Gee S. (2023). Post-diagnostic community services for people living with dementia in Aotearoa New Zealand.*
- *Alzheimers NZ and Dementia NZ. (2023) Fair funding for community-based dementia mate wareware support services*
- *Dementia Prevention, Intervention and Care: 2024 report of the Lancet standing Commission*
- *World Alzheimers Reports 2021 to 2024*