Alzheimers
New Zealand

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Tēnā koutou

Alzheimers New Zealand welcomes the opportunity to provide feedback on the Draft New Zealand Disability Strategy 2026–2030.

About Alzheimers New Zealand
Alzheimers New Zealand is a national umbrella organisation representing people with dementia, their family and whānau. We raise awareness of dementia, provide information and resources, advocate for high quality services, deliver education to the dementia sector, and promote research. We also support local Alzheimers organisations that deliver support, education, information, and related services directly to those living with dementia in their communities.

Our feedback
We support the proposed vision of an inclusive Aotearoa New Zealand, where people with disability can live well, participate in their communities, and exercise their rights. We recommend it also recognises the needs of people with progressive conditions such as dementia, and the importance of equity across the life course.

We support the principles of equity, inclusion, and partnership with tangata whaikaha Māori. To give effect to these, the Strategy should ensure equity at every stage of life, meet the changing needs of older people with disability, and support smooth transitions between services as care needs increase.

It must also recognise, value, and support family and whānau carers, who provide much of day-to-day support for people with disability. Carers need to navigate complex systems including health, legal and service processes, access clear guidance, and education to help them understand and manage these responsibilities. They should have access to respite, support services to maintain their health and wellbeing and fair financial recognition and security for the critical role they play. Supporting carers is essential to sustaining the wider system of care and aligns with the work underway across Government to update the Carers' Strategy Action Plan.

Key issues

Equity across the life course

We support the key issues identified in the draft Strategy, including equity, smooth transitions, continuity of support, and access to integrated services. Older people with disability often face more complex health needs, social isolation, and reduced access to services. Equity must be central to the Strategy so that older people with disability, including those experiencing cognitive decline, have fair access and opportunities. Particular attention is needed for Māori, Pacific peoples, and other groups facing systemic barriers and poorer outcomes.

Transitions and continuity of support

Transitions between disability, aged care, and dementia-specific services are often fragmented and difficult to navigate. The Strategy must ensure integrated and coordinated transitions, so people and families do not fall through gaps.

Supporting family, whānau and carers

Family, whānau and carers of people with disability need clear information, guidance, and support as their needs change over time. Carers play a vital role, but often face challenges that affect their own health and wellbeing. They need support such as respite, reassurance, and help to navigate the services available. Just as importantly, carers need to be recognised in their own right, not only in relation to the person they support.

Many carers have to reduce their hours, leave work, or spend their own savings to provide care. This can leave them struggling financially, both now and later in life. The Strategy needs to make sure carers are not disadvantaged because of their role, and that they have financial stability to continue caring without losing their own security and independence.

Priority outcome areas

1. **Health and wellbeing**

   This is the most critical area for people with dementia and their family and whānau. Success means:

   - timely diagnosis of dementia, regardless of location or background
   - services are disability-aware, dementia-capable, and culturally safe
   - reducing inequities in diagnosis and care for Māori, Pacific peoples, and marginalised groups
   - workforce training in older people, cultural safety, and equity
   - integrated health, disability, and aged care systems to ensure continuity of care
   - investment in respite, counselling, and carer support so they can maintain their wellbeing, and have financial security.
   - services that help people live well in their communities as long as possible, including dementia-friendly initiatives
   - investment in research, innovation, and data to support evidence-based policy and service planning.

2. **Education and skills**
   We support this outcome area. Lifelong learning should include older people and those with early cognitive decline, ensuring opportunities to maintain independence and social participation. Professional training should also emphasise smooth transitions between services to provide consistent and coordinated support.

   Family and whānau carers play a central role in supporting people with dementia mate wareware. Therefore, training and resources should equip them with the knowledge and skills they need to care for their loved ones while maintaining their own wellbeing. Public education should reduce stigma, build understanding, and promote dementia-friendly communities.

3. **Employment**
   We support the goal and description of success. Employment pathways should be flexible and adapt to changing abilities, so older workers and those with cognitive decline can keep contributing. People with younger onset dementia should have opportunities to stay in work with reasonable adjustments and flexible options.

   Family and whānau carers also need guidance, flexible arrangements, and support to balance work and caring responsibilities.

4. **Housing and accessibility**
   We support the goal and description of success. Accessible, safe, and dementia-friendly housing is important for independence and wellbeing. Local support services, assistive technology, and safe community design can reduce isolation and help people stay connected.

5. **Justice and safety**
   We support the goal and description of success. Justice services must respect the rights of older people with disability. Workforces should be trained to understand disability, and legal, police, and court systems need clear protocols to ensure people are treated fairly and safely.

   Family and whānau carers should also be recognised and supported, with guidance and advocacy to navigate legal and safety processes when caring for someone with disability.

6. **Implementation and monitoring**
   Outcomes should measure how older people with disability and those developing cognitive decline experience services, health care, and social participation. Consultation must involve people with lived experience. Services should be integrated and coordinated to prevent gaps and carers' experiences and wellbeing should also be tracked as part of progress monitoring.

Conclusion

Alzheimers New Zealand supports the Draft New Zealand Disability Strategy 2026–2030. To make it meaningful, it should focus on equity across the life course, meet the needs of people with disability and those with cognitive impairments including dementia; provide coordinated support during transitions; recognise, value and strengthen support for family and whānau including access to respite, guidance, and financial security. Tracking outcomes for older people with disability and carers wellbeing is important to ensure the Strategy delivers real improvements.

Ngā mihi

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