



Alzheimers New Zealand

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.

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 2026-2031](#). This starts with five immediate priority areas to address the dementia challenge over the coming five years:
 - Taking action to promote brain health in a bid to reduce dementia prevalence
 - Ensuring timely and accurate diagnosis and comprehensive management planning for people with dementia
 - Improving community dementia support services
 - Better supporting both the formal and informal dementia workforces
 - Providing more effective governance for and within the dementia sector.

2. Fund community-based dementia services appropriately to provide critical support for people 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 support 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.



Alzheimers New Zealand

Position paper

Progressively implement and fund the Dementia Mate Wareware Action Plan 2026-2031

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. The Government can significantly relieve this pressure and reduce health system costs by progressively implementing and funding the [Dementia Mate Wareware Action Plan 2026-2031](#).

Five priority actions should be started immediately:

1. Promote brain health
2. Ensure timely and accurate diagnosis and comprehensive management planning for people with dementia
3. Improve community dementia mate wareware support
4. Support formal and informal dementia workforces
5. Provide effective governance.

The Action Plan is about making sure everyone has equitable access to services, no matter their age, 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. Dementia cases are already taking up much-needed and costly hospital and aged residential care beds.

In 2025, around 83,000 New Zealanders are living with dementia. This number is projected to more than double to 170,000 by 2050, costing taxpayers around \$_10.65 billion a year by 2050 in inflation-adjusted costs¹.

The background

Currently, three people develop dementia every hour in New Zealand, over 500 a week. With a rapidly ageing population, the number of people with dementia is growing at an unprecedented rate. By 2050, this will rise to four people per hour.

By 2028, one million New Zealanders will be aged 65 years and over. With a rapidly ageing population, the number of people with dementia is growing at an unprecedented rate. Health inequities further complicate this picture; with dementia increasing faster among Māori, Pacific peoples, and Asian communities.

The solution

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

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

¹Assuming 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 over three years in New Zealand's 17 Alzheimers and dementia community-based dementia services. This amount includes the current \$11.8 million per year for these services, which is not enough to meet the rapidly growing demand in their communities. Funding these services is a priority action in the [Dementia Mate Wareware Action Plan 2026-2031](#). This investment will allow these services to keep pace with community needs and help relieve rapidly growing pressure on the more expensive health system.



The problem

Community-based dementia services provide critical support for people with dementia, their families, and care partners. They help people through their dementia journey, stay active, and live independently at home for as long as possible. But these services cannot meet the existing demand, never mind the 170,000 dementia cases New Zealand can expect by 2050. The problem is chronic, long-term underfunding by successive Governments have left many services struggling to survive. The Wairarapa service receives no Government funding at all.

The background

Government funding for these services covers only the operational cost for about 13 per cent of people with dementia. This leaves around 37,600 people with dementia² without the help they need. Without support, families struggle, carers face more stress and people with dementia may decline faster, leading to more hospital visits and added pressure on the already overloaded health system. If properly funded, these services would cost just \$11.11 a day, 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 growing demand. A total of \$127.3 million over three years, including the current \$11.8 million per year, is needed to support a new service model. This investment will enable these services to deliver early and ongoing support to 37,400 families, help free-up hospital and emergency department beds, help people stay at home longer, prevent health crises, and better support families and care partners.

² Of the 83,000 people estimated to have dementia in 2025, around 11,000 people (13 per cent) receive support from local Alzheimers and Dementia organisations, 25,000 (30 per cent) are in residential care, and, it is assumed, 20 per cent are able to pay for their services and/or receive support from one of the pilot programmes.

This leaves an estimated 37,600 people 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 system, 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.



The problem

Right now, we don't have such a strategy. Which is problematic because by 2028, one in five New Zealanders - around one million people - will be aged 65 years or over. Older people are the biggest users of the health system, which is already struggling and certainly not prepared for the significant extra demand our ageing population will create.

The background

Most people with dementia in New Zealand are over 65, with only around 8 per cent under 65. By 2050, four people will develop dementia every hour in New Zealand, and nearly three per cent of all New Zealanders will be living with the condition. This will add extra pressure to an already stretched health system, which also faces rising rates of disability and chronic health conditions requiring ongoing care.

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. This becomes a major issue when the health and aged care sectors are totally disconnected. Even within the same sector, services can be 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 a well-planned, managed, and funded integrated health and aged care strategy that meets the needs of all stakeholders - to ensure it is equitable and sustainable.