

Alzheimer's Australia 2020 Summit submission

Health- a long-term national health strategy

Dementia - one of the biggest health problems facing Australia

Australia has an ageing population, and as the baby boomers starts ageing, the impact of dementia will increase dramatically. Dementia is not a natural part of ageing, but risk does increase as people get older. In 2020, the number of people with dementia will exceed 330 000, a 50% increase since 2007. In 2050, there are projected to be over 175,000 new cases every year, more than the total number of people with dementia in Australia in 2000.¹

Dementia is more than Aged Care. Dementia is a key issue for Public Health policy, a potential target for preventive health approaches and a major cause of chronic disability and carer burden for Australians. Australia has a world class Health and Aged Care system, which is not sustainable unless reforms including additional funding for dementia are put in place in the next 3 years. Access Economics estimated the direct and indirect cost of dementia at over \$6 billion in 2002.² If the lack of public funding is not addressed, then this figure will increase exponentially.

There is bipartisan support for the *Dementia Initiative – Making Dementia a National Health Priority* and continuing it beyond 2009. Our priorities³ are to:

1. Improve the diagnosis of dementia by GPs
2. Expand community care services for people with dementia and their carers
3. Improve access to quality dementia care in residential services
4. Improve access to appropriate care for special groups, in particular people with younger onset dementia,⁴ CALD⁵ and indigenous people.⁶

¹ Access Economics, (2005) "Dementia Estimates and Projections: All States and Territories" Report for Alzheimer's Australia, available at <http://www.alzheimers.org.au/upload/EstimatesProjectionsNational.pdf>

² Access Economics (2003) "The Dementia epidemic: Economic impact and positive solutions for Australia" Report for Alzheimer's Australia, available at <http://www.alzheimers.org.au/upload/EpidemicFullReportMarch2003.pdf>

³ For more information on AA priorities, see National Consumer Committee, Alzheimer's Australia (2007) "National Dementia Manifesto 2007-2010", available at <http://www.alzheimers.org.au/upload/Manifesto0710.pdf>

⁴ More information on Younger onset dementia is available at <http://www.alzheimers.org.au/content.cfm?infopageid=914>

⁵ See, Access Economics, (2006) "Dementia prevalence and Incidence among Australians who do not speak English at home" Report for Alzheimer's Australia, available at <http://www.alzheimers.org.au/upload/NoEnglishAtHome.pdf>

5. Ensure a workforce able to deliver quality dementia care to all people with dementia
6. Promote advance care planning for people with dementia⁷
7. Increase dementia research funding into cause, prevention and care

Less than 0.3% of the total annual cost of dementia care in Australia is spent on dementia research.⁸ This is an inadequate investment for the future given the very real economic and human consequences.⁹ The returns from investment in research could be great.

If the average onset of Alzheimer's disease was reduced by 5 years from 2005, then there would be 35% fewer new cases of dementia by 2020, cumulative savings of \$13.5 billion would be realised. The end result is not only a reduction in the economic impact of the condition but also improved quality of life for people.¹⁰

To quote Professor Anthony Jorm, author of *Dementia: a major health problem for Australia*

“As the tide of infectious diseases has gone out, the rocks that were always there have been revealed. These rocks are heart disease and cancer. But gradually, even heart disease and cancer are receding as we see the benefits of prevention programs and better treatments.

As the tide of these diseases retreats, what other rocks will be revealed? The answer is...“neurodegenerative diseases”...These will be a major challenge for the health system in the 21st century. By far the biggest of these neurodegenerative diseases, in terms of numbers of people affected, is Alzheimer's disease.”¹¹

⁶ See, Alzheimer's Australia, (2007) “Dementia, a major problem for Indigenous people” paper No.12, available at <http://www.alzheimers.org.au/upload/Indigenous.pdf>

⁷ See, Alzheimer's Australia, “Decision making in advance: Reducing barriers and improving access to advance directives for people with dementia” Discussion paper 8, available at http://alzheimers.org.au/upload/Decision_Making_in_Advance_May_2006.pdf

⁸ Access Economics (2003) “The Dementia epidemic: Economic impact and positive solutions for Australia” Report for Alzheimer's Australia, available at <http://www.alzheimers.org.au/upload/EpidemicFullReportMarch2003.pdf>

⁹ See, Alzheimer's Australia virtual group, “Dementia research: A vision for Australia” <http://www.alzheimers.org.au/upload/ResearchVision.pdf>

¹⁰ Access Economics (2004) “Delaying the onset of Alzheimer's Disease: Projections and Issues” Report for Alzheimer's Australia, available at <http://www.alzheimers.org.au/upload/DelayingOnsetAccessEconomicsAugust2004.pdf>

¹¹ Alzheimer's Australia (2001) “Dementia: a major health problem for Australia” *Position paper*, p.1, available at <http://www.alzheimers.org.au/upload/pp1jorm.pdf>