**Media release – September 3rd 2019**

**Alzheimers NZ and Ryman Healthcare combat dementia stigma**

Bronwyn Donald’s mother has dementia. She also suffers hugely from the stigma that is associated with the condition, with former friends not talking to her and people avoiding her.

Bronwyn says her mother’s dementia means she doesn’t understand what’s happening to her, but Bronwyn says the way her mother is treated because of her condition is ‘appalling’.

Combating this stigma and improving our understanding and acceptance of people living with dementia is the focus of a new partnership between Alzheimers NZ and Ryman Healthcare.

Dementiaaffects nearly 80 percent of Kiwis – most families - in some way, and the number of New Zealanders living with the condition is expected to almost triple in just three decades.

“Despite dementia being widespread within our communities and touching most families in some way,the condition is hugely mis-understood and feared,” said Alzheimers NZ chair Dr Ngaire Dixon.

“There is a tremendous amount of stigma associated with it. Many of us only see a person with dementia as someone who gets a diagnosis and is then told to ‘get their affairs in order’.

“The reality is that most New Zealanders who live with dementia live at home for most of their time with the condition and many continue to live purposeful and independent lives.

“We really must change the misconceptions about dementia and that’s why this partnership with Ryman Healthcare is so important.”

The partnership will leverage Alzheimers NZ’s particular expertise and understanding of New Zealand’s dementia community. Ryman brings practical, day-to-day experience of supporting people affected by dementia, extensive community reach and funding.

The goal is to increase knowledge and understanding of dementia, highlight and address stigma, and inform policy and practice about what’s needed to better support people affected by dementia. The two organisations are working together to build a more dementia friendly New Zealand.

The announcement of the partnership comes just months after Alzheimers NZ released new research that includes the findings of New Zealanders living with dementia talking about the impact of the stigma to which they are subjected.

It also comes just weeks before Alzheimer’s Disease International (ADI) plans to release the findings of a global survey into dementia and stigma. That survey also features responses from New Zealanders.

Ryman Healthcare chief executive Gordon MacLeod said he was delighted to be working with Alzheimers New Zealand.

“Dementia takes a massive toll on those living with the condition, their care partners, and their families and we want to do all we can to help.

“Our team has a wealth of experience in dementia care and we want to use our resources to support Alzheimers NZ in its fight to improve knowledge and understanding of dementia.’’

As part of the agreement Ryman Healthcare has signed up to the New Zealand Dementia Declaration, written by people who have dementia and outlining what they need to live well.

Hundreds of the company’s staff have also joined Alzheimers NZ’s Dementia Friends campaign.

Ryman will also work with Alzheimers NZ to disseminate throughout its villages latest research into the causes and treatment of dementia, and give residents and team members the chance to participate in research programmes.

“This is a significant alliance for us, and we are really excited about what we can achieve,’’ Mr MacLeod said.

“We’re on the same team in this battle and we know it is only going to get tougher in the years ahead.”

Ryman’s villages have also taken part in the Dementia Friendly New Zealand Programme, and will be audited shortly to make sure they are doing everything they can to provide environments and services that are dementia friendly.

Ryman Healthcare is New Zealand’s largest retirement village operator and has 841 dementia care beds in New Zealand and Victoria, and has plans to build another 640 in the medium term.

Ryman has been providing specialist dementia care for its residents for more 23 years.

**Editor’s note.** Bronwyn is happy to do media interviews about the stigma her mother encounters because of her dementia. To arrange an interview, and/or to speak to Alzheimers NZ chair, Ngaire Dixon, contact Daniel Paul (021) 400-993.

For more information from Ryman, contact David King, Ryman Healthcare Corporate Affairs Manager, on 021 499 602 (+64 21 499 602) or email david.king@rymanhealthcare.com

**About Alzheimers New Zealand:**

Alzheimers NZ is the lead organisation working at a national level representing people living with dementia. Alzheimers NZ focuses on raising awareness of dementia, supporting people with dementia to live well, and advocating for more and better services for all New Zealanders affected by dementia. Its goal is to help build an open and inclusive society - a place where people living with dementia feel valued, where they can contribute to and participate in their communities, and where they feel safe.

**About Ryman Healthcare:** Ryman Healthcare was founded in Christchurch in 1984 and owns and operates 36 retirement villages in New Zealand and Australia. Ryman villages are home to 11,200 residents, and the company employs over 5,500 staff.