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**Alzheimers NZ calls for urgent action on dementia healthcare challenge**

Alzheimers NZ is urging the government to use next year’s Budget to address what is one of the 21st century’s greatest health challenges.

Alzheimers NZ has recently provided advice to the government on what should be included in next year’s Budget to help the country address the massive dementia challenge it is facing.

Chief executive, Catherine Hall, said the scale of the problem is vast. It is distressing to watch people struggle so much, and to see the spiralling impacts of that struggle. She says urgent action is needed.

“Nearly 70,000 people have dementia now and we expect that number to increase to 170,000 by 2050 as New Zealand’s population continues to age.

“And that is just the tip of the iceberg. For every person diagnosed with dementia there are family, whānau and friends also affected by the diagnosis.”

As well as the human impact, there are significant fiscal costs associated with dementia.

Ms Hall said the per-person health and social care costs associated with dementia almost match the combined costs of cancer, heart disease and stroke.[[1]](#footnote-1)

Alzheimers NZ’s Budget 2020 advice focussed on initiatives designed to support people living with dementia and their family/whānau care partners to live their best possible lives.

“Current services are woefully inadequate and enhancing them would greatly improve the quality of life for people living with dementia, and significantly reduce the adverse impact of dementia on the health system.”

Alzheimers NZ is calling for at least 12 months post-diagnosis support to equip people to live well through services provided by the local dementia-specific NGO.

It also wants dementia navigation services for all people affected by dementia.

Also on its list is flexible, available and accessible respite services so care partners can take a break.

Alzheimers NZ’s recommendations to government are part of a draft Dementia Plan the organisation has co-authored with other leading representatives in the dementia sector.

The plan will shortly be out for consultation. Ms Hall hopes it will be finalised soon and that government will commit to its implementation to address the country’s looming dementia challenge.

“Dementia is a difficult issue. No one really likes talking about it or facing up to it, but as a healthcare challenge for New Zealand and New Zealanders it’s only going to get worse.

“Government has to act and act now. The dementia sector is more than willing to do its share of the heavy lifting, but we desperately need government to take the lead.

“Hopefully Budget 2020 will be the vehicle that brings much-needed relief to the tens of thousands of New Zealanders who desperately need it.”

For more information contact Daniel Paul (021) 400-993

1. Luengo-Fernandez, R., et.al, (2010). Dementia 2010: The prevalence, economic cost and research funding of dementia compared with other major diseases. A report produced by the Health Economics Research Centre, University of Oxford for the Alzheimer’s Research Trust. Cambridge: Alzheimer’s Research Trust. [↑](#footnote-ref-1)