**Businesses must act now for people living with dementia**

Dementia is one of New Zealand’s most significant and growing healthcare challenges, and the business community need to prepare for it now.

So says Alzheimers New Zealand chief executive Catherine Hall, who is calling on businesses to review how they respond to their more vulnerable customers following Radio New Zealand’s report of alleged elder abuse in Christchurch.

Ms Hall says the number of New Zealanders who are living with dementia is expected to triple over the next few decades.

Therefore, all organisations have to come to terms with supporting their more vulnerable customers, some of who will be living with dementia.

“Our Dementia Friendly Recognition Programme is designed to encourage organisations, like banks, to put measures and initiatives in place that actively support people with dementia, whether they be staff and their families, or customers.

“Little changes make a very big difference to the way someone living with dementia manages their banking and interacts with organisations.”

One such example is Westpac; Ms Hall said it became New Zealand’s first dementia-friendly bank after meeting strict criteria last year and receiving an Alzheimers New Zealand Dementia-Friendly Award.

Staff have been trained to help recognise, understand and respond to the needs of customers living with dementia, while helping people with dementia to access financial services and get support to remain independent for as long as possible.

Currently, more than 62,000 Kiwis have dementia and that is expected to triple to over 170,000 people by 2050.

The costs of dementia, $1.7 billion in 2016, are expected to rise to nearly $5 billion a year in the next 30 years.

While Ms Hall says the government has to do something, and fast, businesses and residents can also play their part in responding to the ever-growing dementia challenge.

“People can become Dementia Friends, to raise awareness and build a more understanding, inclusive and supportive New Zealand.

“Every action a Dementia Friend takes counts. Even small actions can make a big difference.”

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