**MEDIA RELEASE**

May 3, 2020

**Dementia – urgent action needed now more than ever**

A national response plan has now been developed to address one of the most significant health challenges facing New Zealand after Covid-19.

The number of Kiwis diagnosed with dementia is expected to triple in coming years, which will have an impact on four out of five people and cost the economy some $5 billion a year by 2050.

In response to this desperate situation, three dementia sector organisations have collaborated to develop the first ever Dementia Action Plan for New Zealand.

It has been widely consulted on within New Zealand’s dementia community, including feedback from over 300 individuals and groups, and has attracted overwhelming support.

The plan has now been presented to health minister David Clark and associate health minister Jenny Salesa.

Spokesperson for the plan, Alister Robertson, who has dementia and has been on the board of various dementia organisations, said the plan sets out the changes that must be made to the health system to better support people with dementia and their care partners.

“Successive governments have ignored the dementia issue, and the growing number of New Zealanders with the condition have been marginalised. Right now, the health services and support structures for people affected by dementia, like me, are woefully inadequate.

“In my experience, what services there are, are underfunded and largely unsupportive of people living with the condition. It is beyond belief that a group of New Zealanders is so badly forgotten.”

Robertson said in light of the lack of political action on dementia, Alzheimers NZ, Dementia NZ and the NZ Dementia Foundation collaborated to develop the Dementia Action Plan.

Robertson said the plan is needed urgently. “COVID-19 has brought into sharp focus the major challenges I face, and others like me face, when living with dementia.

“We’ve done most of the heavy lifting – now we need government to fund it and support us to implement it.”

The impact of COVID-19 has also put serious long-term financial and funding pressure on the charities that provide the much-needed dementia support services in the community.

“People like me rely heavily on those organisations but they now face collapse and need urgent government support,” says Robertson. “Without it, they may very well go under leaving thousands of us – some of the most vulnerable New Zealanders - without any support at all.”

For more information and to arrange an interview with Mr Robertson (who has dementia) contact – *Daniel Paul, 021 400 993*

**- ends -**

**Editors’ note:**

* The Lancet describes dementia as [“the greatest global challenge for health and social care in the 21st century](http://www.thelancet.com/journals/lancet/article/PIIS0140-6736%2817%2931363-6/fulltext)”.
* The OECD describes it as the [[“fastest growing major cause of disability globally](https://www.oecd-ilibrary.org/social-issues-migration-health/addressing-dementia/the-growing-human-and-financial-cost-of-dementia_9789264231726-5-en)”.](https://www.oecd-ilibrary.org/social-issues-migration-health/addressing-dementia/the-growing-human-and-financial-cost-of-dementia_9789264231726-5-en)
* The WHO wants action and has developed an [[international plan](https://apps.who.int/iris/bitstream/handle/10665/259615/9789241513487-eng.pdf;jsessionid=4B5D93D723E4D08E620C24AF88FD3C97?sequence=1).](https://www.who.int/mental_health/neurology/dementia/action_plan_2017_2025/en/)
* Around [70,000 New Zealanders have dementia](https://www.alzheimers.org.nz/news/dementia-economic-impact-report-2016). Numbers grew by 29% between 2011 and 2016. The total is [likely to exceed 170,000](https://www.alzheimers.org.nz/news/dementia-economic-impact-report-2016) by 2050.
* In NZ, the associated per person [annual health and social care costs of dementia](https://www.sciencedaily.com/releases/2013/04/130403200202.htm) exceed those for cancer or heart disease.
* Dementia is likely to cost the NZ economy around [$5 billion a year](https://www.alzheimers.org.nz/getmedia/79f7fd09-93fe-43b0-a837-771027bb23c0/Economic-Impacts-of-Dementia-2017.pdf/) by 2050.
* Dementia has the potential to overwhelm the health system. Care of older people is likely to account [for [50% of District Health Board (DHB) expenditure by 2025/26](https://www.health.govt.nz/system/files/documents/publications/healthy-ageing-strategy_june_2017.pdf)](http://www.superseniors.msd.govt.nz/documents/health/healthy-ageing-strategy.pdf) (almost 20% increase since 2015/16).

**Despite dementia’s massive negative impact, New Zealand has no concrete, government-supported national action plan**