**News release**

**The harsh reality of dementia in New Zealand**

Rapidly growing numbers of New Zealanders living with dementia threaten to overwhelm our health system unless government acts quickly, Alzheimers NZ has said in its Briefing to the Incoming Minister of Health.

Chief Executive Catherine Hall says the impact of dementia is so huge it has to be considered a top health priority for government after Covid-19.

“The number of New Zealanders with dementia and the economic costs of the condition are both expected to nearly triple in coming years as our population ages, effectively swamping the health system’s ability to cope.”

Alzheimers NZ has urged new Health Minister Andrew Little to act on Labour’s pre-election promise to ‘work with the (dementia) sector to implement the Dementia Action Plan’.

Labour said it would focus on prevention of dementia, support for whānau to navigate support services, building community acceptance, and strengthening capability in the sector.

“The harsh reality is that dementia affects nearly every New Zealand family at some point and in some way. The many tens of thousands of New Zealanders with dementia, their care partners and their families are desperate for Labour to keep its promise now it’s in a position to do so,” Ms Hall said.

“Current services are woefully inadequate and underfunded, and if the level of inequity and marginalisation associated with dementia occurred in any other sector of our society, there would be a public and political outcry.”

Alzheimers NZ’s briefing document to the Minister outlines four action areas government must address. They are:

* Reducing the incidence of dementia
* Supporting people to live their best possible lives
* Building accepting and understanding communities
* Strengthening leadership and capability across the dementia sector

These action areas are detailed in the Dementia Action Plan which the sector prepared and presented to the previous government earlier this year.

Ms Hall said the World Health Organization is so concerned about dementia it has developed a Global Action Plan on the Public Health Response for Dementia Care 2017-2025 to hold countries to account.

“For the WHO to single dementia out like this … the situation is obviously extremely serious and it’s obviously extremely urgent,” Ms Hall said.

“And, unless our government acts now, it’s only going to get worse as our population ages.”

\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_

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