**World Alzheimer Report 2020 released**

Alzheimers NZ wants more focus on designing buildings, particularly commercial and government buildings, to reflect the needs of people affected by dementia.

Chief executive Catherine Hall says buildings cater for physically disabled people – they should also cater for people with cognitive disabilities like dementia.

“We’ve seen great progress made for people with physical disabilities. It’s vital that policy makers, planners, architects and builders also embrace designs that support people with invisible disabilities, such as dementia, to live full, active, and independent lives with dignity.”

Ms Hall was welcoming the release of the **World Alzheimer Report 2020:** **Design, Dignity, Dementia; dementia-related design and the built environment[[1]](#footnote-1).**

The report was issued by Alzheimers Disease International (ADI), which is calling for dementia to be more overtly recognised by governments globally as a disability.

The report sets out the design principles that would ensure buildings better meet the needs of people affected by dementia, and calls on governments to include dementia design in their national dementia plans.

“Sadly, New Zealand does not yet have a national dementia plan backed by government, but the dementia sector in New Zealand did include dementia-related design in the plan we prepared earlier this year as a blueprint for government’s action on dementia,” Ms Hall said.

A strong reason for ensuring the day-to-day built environment reflects the needs of people affected by dementia is that they tend to live at home in their communities for most of their time with the condition.

As part of their daily lives they use the same buildings, pavements and streets as everyone else, but not always with the same ability to negotiate what, to them, can be major obstacles and hazards.

Another reason is that the number of New Zealanders with dementia is expected to almost triple in coming years, putting even more of a strain on what are already woefully inadequate services and making it even more urgent that our environment reflects their needs.

Dementia design does not have to be a costly exercise and can be as simple as considering things like carpets and décor, the removal of hazards, reducing stimulation, clear wayfinding - measures that can reduce anxiety and agitation and improve social interactions.

When releasing the 2020 World Alzheimer Report, ADI Chief Executive, Paola Barbarino, cited an example of the problem: “I recall during a site inspection of a venue for a conference, the black areas on colourful carpets could look like holes in the floor, and people living with dementia might walk around them because they could be worried about falling into them,” says Barbarino.

“Things like mirrors on the walls can be an issue, as people with dementia can be disoriented by seeing their own reflection, especially at night.”

Ms Hall said New Zealanders living with dementia are some of the most vulnerable of our citizens, but very little is done to accommodate their needs.

“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.

“Dementia is a disability, it’s as simple as that. And it’s going to become more of an issue for our communities and our government as our society ages.

“We are calling on all political Parties to grasp that fact and do something about it.

“Implementing a national dementia plan would be a good place to start!”

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

1. FLEMING, R., ZEISEL, J. & BENNETT, K. 2020. World Alzheimer’s Report 2020: Design Dignity Dementia, Case Studies. London, England: Alzheimer’s Disease International. [↑](#footnote-ref-1)