

National Aged Care Alliance

Dementia as a National Health Priority

January 2005

The National Aged Care Alliance strongly supports the commitment made by the Australian Government to making dementia a National Health Priority and to making \$200 million available over four years to support that commitment.

The National Aged Care Alliance (the Alliance) considers that it is important to establish a national framework to address dementia as a National Health Priority and to support strategies that promote early detection and intervention. Several states and territories have dementia plans and those who do not should be encouraged to develop plans. It is important that national action is taken that recognises the impact of dementia on all parts of the health care system.

1. Making Dementia a National Health Priority

Within the \$52 million allocated by the Australian Government, the Alliance recommends that:

- The main elements of the four year strategy should be to: promote awareness; research; improve care; and expand information and support programs.
- Up to \$20 million of the funding should be allocated for dementia research including care and medical research. The objective should be to boost available funding for dementia research, build dementia research capacity and promote cooperation and collaboration between existing centres of research in Australia and internationally.
- Priority should be given to the development of a package to assist GPs to facilitate better diagnosis and management of dementia including in conjunction with Memory Clinics and Geriatric/Psychogeriatric Assessment Services.
- After diagnosis the GP or specialist must be able to refer people with dementia, their families and carers to a comprehensive range of specialised and multi-disciplinary services including community health and nursing services and aged care assessment teams.

- People with dementia their families and carers should have access to information, support, education and 'living with memory loss' programs including those available through Alzheimer's Australia.
- The needs of those with severe behavioural and psychological symptoms of dementia or late stage needs (such as falls prevention, nutrition/swallowing and palliative care) should be a priority for the policy work and program development of the Australian Government and the States and Territories.

There is scope for collaborative work between the Australian Government and the States and Territories also on the role of memory clinics and on dementia and associated legal issues.

- An awareness campaign should be implemented in collaboration with Alzheimer's Australia to promote an understanding of the benefits of early diagnosis and intervention and the opportunities for risk reduction.

2. Care at Home for People with Dementia

The Alliance strongly supports the provision of \$128 million to fund dementia specific EACH packages. It is important that evaluation is incorporated into this initiative from the outset. In developing this initiative it will be important to define the target group (to distinguish it from the target groups for existing EACH packages) and the profile of service providers able to provide such services. It provides an opportunity for piloting, on a small scale, budget-holding options for consumers.

3. Training to Care for People with Dementia

The National Aged Care Alliance supports the provision of \$20 million to fund additional accredited and non-accredited training places through the Carer Education and Workforce Training project. The proposal to train 8,000 community care staff and residential care workers and up to 6,000 extra carers and community workers such as police and transport staff should contribute to improved service outcomes.

The Alliance supports the view that additional funding should also be available to enable more nurses in the acute, community health and aged care sectors to develop specialist nursing skills in dementia care.

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