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Media Release

Dramatic new dementia figures reveal multi-billion dollar cost

The number of people with dementia in Australia has soared to more than 400,000 – and almost 139,000 in NSW - with an estimated cost to the community of more than \$14 billion this year alone, a new report has found. The research predicts this number will climb by another \$4 billion in just eight years as the number of people living with the condition continues to rise dramatically.

The report, *The Economic Cost of Dementia in Australia 2016-2056*, commissioned by Alzheimer's Australia and released today, has found that if nothing is done to reduce the incidence of dementia, the cost will blow out to more than \$18 billion by 2025, in today's dollars, and more than double to \$36 billion in less than 40 years as the number of people with dementia soars, from an estimated 413,000 people in 2017, to 536,000 people by 2025 and a staggering 1.1 million people by 2056.

In NSW, there is an estimated 138,700 people with dementia in 2017, which is estimated to increase to 175,000 by 2025 and 326,000 by 2056. This is expected to cost NSW \$4.7 billion in 2017, which is expected to soar to \$5.96 billion in eight years, by 2025, and to \$10.6 billion by 2056.

Nationally, the report found that there is estimated to be 244 new cases of dementia each day this year alone, which will grow to an estimated 318 people per day by 2025 and more than 650 per day people by 2056.

However, the report also found that just a five per cent reduction in the number of people with dementia over the age of 65 could lead to savings of \$5.7 billion from 2016-25, and a staggering \$120.4 billion by 2056.

Alzheimer's Australia NSW CEO The Hon. John Watkins said the figures contained in the report, by the University of Canberra's National Centre for Social and Economic Modelling (NATSEM), were alarming and a very big wake-up call and has renewed the call for a funded National Dementia Strategy to deal with the issue, along with a greater focus on risk reduction measures.

"Dementia, which is a National Health Priority Area, is one of the major chronic diseases of this century," Mr Watkins said.

"It is already the second leading cause of death in Australia and we know that the impact is far reaching.

"Despite the social and economic impact we still do not have a fully-funded national strategy to provide better care and outcomes for people who are living with dementia now, nor are we taking risk reduction seriously in order to try to reduce the numbers of people living with dementia in the future.

"The time for action is now. If we don't do something now, the cost is going to continue to grow to unsustainable levels."

In the 2017-18 pre-budget submission to the Federal Government, Alzheimer's Australia has called for a staged approach to implementing a funded National Dementia Strategy, with immediate action on funding:

- for a more comprehensive risk reduction program to raise awareness of brain health and the links between lifestyle and health factors and the risk of developing dementia, cognitive impairment and other chronic conditions (\$3 million);

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- to develop a consumer-based Quality in Dementia Care program to improve aged care services, both in residential aged care and in the community (\$1 million);
- to improve access to quality respite care to better support people with dementia living in the community, their families and carers (\$15 million).

Dawn and Glyn McKay have welcomed calls for improvements to dementia care and support. Dawn's husband Glyn was diagnosed with vascular dementia six years ago, and attends respite twice a week, which Dawn said was appropriate and engaging.

"It is so important for people with dementia to be able to continue to have social engagement," Mrs McKay said.

"People living with dementia need quality community, aged care and respite options."

Mrs McKay said that in addition to improvements to quality care, respite and support options, she would like to see dementia research given similar priority to other chronic health conditions.

Deputy Director at the Institute for Governance and Policy Analysis at the University of Canberra's National Centre for Social and Economic Modelling (NATSEM) Professor Laurie Brown said the significance of these new, national dementia figures could not be under-estimated.

"What these figures show is an alarming upward trend of not only the number of people likely to be living with dementia over the next 40 years, but also the tremendous economic impact this will have on the entire Australian population. Not to mention the lasting social impact on those living with dementia, their carers and family and friends," Professor Brown said.

"The sharp rise in the number of people likely to be diagnosed with dementia in the next 40 years, and the more than doubling of current estimates on the economic costs of dementia in Australia, is largely due to the increasing number of older people in our population and the fact that Australians are living much longer. As well, we now have access to better Australian-based data on the number of people likely to have dementia now and into the future.

"A whole-of-community approach to risk reduction, and better co-ordinated care, along with a boost to research, is going to be needed if we are to curb the rise in people living with dementia by 2056."

Key findings from *The Economic Cost of Dementia in Australia 2016-2056* are available [here](#).

Alzheimer's Australia is the charity for people with dementia and their families and carers. As the peak body, it provides advocacy, support services, education and information. An estimated 413,000 people have dementia in Australia. This number is projected to reach more than 1.1 million in 40 years.

National Dementia Helpline: 1800 100 500

An interpreter service is available

(The National Dementia Helpline is an Australian Government Initiative)

Dementia is a National Health Priority Area

www.fightdementia.org.au

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Editors please note, a full copy of *The Economic Cost of Dementia in Australia 2016-2056* and Alzheimer's Australia's 2017-18 Budget Submission is available on request.