

The Greens Dementia Plan

Australia is facing a dementia epidemic. While dementia is currently the largest single cause of disability in older Australians (responsible for one year in every six of the disability burden on those over 65) and is the third largest cause of death ... its impact on our health and care system is expected to rise dramatically in coming decades. By 2030 the number of Australians with dementia will double to 592,000 ... and then nearly double again in the following 20 years - up to 1.13 million by 2050.¹

Dementia impacts on every part of the health and care system and complicates the treatment of other chronic conditions. It is expected to become the third greatest source of health and residential aged care spending within the next two decades – with these costs alone rising to around 1% of GDP.² By the 2060s dementia spending is predicted to rise to \$83 billion – accounting for around 11% of spending in health and residential aged care combined.³

The current cost of dementia care is estimated at over \$5.4 billion per annum, with the replacement cost of unpaid family carers accounting for another \$5.5 billion per annum. On current trends by 2030 Australia is expected to face a shortage of more than 150,000 carers (paid and unpaid).⁴

This is a serious issue which our current health, aged and community care systems are ill-prepared to face. It is abundantly clear that we need to be starting now to put in place the Dementia care system of the future, and that we need to be putting more effort and resources into research and development on the causes and prevention of dementia.

The Greens support the vision for a world class dementia care system put forward by Alzheimer's Australia in '*Dementia: facing the epidemic*' and will invest \$70 million over 4 years to prioritise early intervention and diagnosis, support for carers and those living with dementia, and fund additional research into the causes of dementia. The Greens will fund this using savings recouped from the \$800 million wasted each year on keeping elderly people waiting in hospital for aged care services.

The Greens plan includes:

Prioritising early intervention and diagnosis (\$30m over four years). While 90% of Australians indicate they would visit their GP if concerned about their memory it is estimated that 90% of mild dementia cases are undetected in general practice – so a specific program aimed at improving diagnosis and assessment for GPs has the potential to provide great benefit, particularly if combined with better referral to specialist dementia services.

¹ Access Economics – Keeping dementia front of mind: incidence and prevalence 2009-2050

² Alzheimer's Australia – *Dementia: facing the epidemic*, 2009

³ Alzheimer's Australia – *Dementia: facing the epidemic*, 2009

⁴ Access Economics – Keeping dementia front of mind: incidence and prevalence 2009-2050

Increased funding for dementia research and development (\$20m over four years⁵) that focuses on measures to reduce the prevalence and incidence of dementia by better understanding its causes, developing medical interventions to delay its onset and progress, identifying those most at risk of developing dementia, and understanding lifestyle factors that may reduce its risk.

Extension of the National Dementia Support Program for people living with dementia (\$10m over 5 years) to provide a helpline and counselling assistance to people with dementia and their family carers, which includes practical advice on living with memory loss. This is an extension of an existing program that has proven to be effective.

Public Education and Community awareness campaign (\$2m over 4 years) to reduce the stigma of dementia (particularly for those with younger onset dementia) and let people know that support services are available - with messaging modelled on that of the UK National Dementia Strategy. Also to inform ageing Australians of lifestyle changes that can reduce the risk of dementia ... building on the success of Alzheimer's Australia's 'Mind your Mind' campaign.

A Dementia Care Workforce strategy (\$4m over 4 years) to improve the awareness, knowledge and skills of the existing care workforce, and to provide higher order professional development and training for a dementia care specialisation.

Extending Dementia Behaviour Management Advisory Services (\$2m over 4 years) that provides clinical advice and support to residential and community care providers in the management of the difficult behaviours often associated with dementia sufferers.

A National Quality Dementia Care Knowledge Network (\$2m over 4 years) that facilitates knowledge transfer by extending the results of biomedical research to dementia care providers and consumers.

Increased support for Community Care (\$50m p/a over 4 years⁶) for the estimated 60% of people with dementia living in the community, of whom 37% receiving no formal care. The replacement value of current informal and family care is estimated at \$5.5 billion p/a. Increased investment in helping families cope through support and respite services can deliver improved quality of life, delay the need to transfer to residential care, and greatly reduce the longer term cost of dementia care to the health and care system. The existing community care system needs to be reformed to provide a better spectrum of care (See Aged Care for the Future).

Improved dementia care services in residential care (\$6m p/a over 4 years⁷) for the estimated half of our elderly Australians living in residential care who have a diagnosis of dementia and many more have some form of cognitive impairment. While the aged care funding instrument does include a behavioural supplement to address the special demands of dementia care, additional measures are needed to improve the quality of care and to develop specific dementia care places for those with severe behavioural and psychological symptoms.

⁵ This funding allocation is identified specifically in The Greens 'Aged Care for the Future' policy initiative and is not additional to it.

⁶ This \$50m p/a is a specific component of the \$390m p/a extended community care package contained in The Greens 'Aged Care for the Future' policy initiative and is not additional to it.

⁷ This \$6m p/a is a specific component of the \$127m p/a increased funding for residential care package contained in The Greens 'Aged Care for the Future' policy initiative and is not additional to it.