

Media Release

INVEST IN A FUTURE WITHOUT DEMENTIA

Alzheimer's Australia today, released a report '*Australian Dementia Research*' that recommends annual funding for dementia research be increased three-fold to \$36 million in response to the growing economic and social impact of the dementia epidemic.

Prepared by the Dementia Collaborative Research Centre at the University of NSW, the report concludes that current investment over the last six years in dementia research was about \$13 million, 0.6% of the total direct costs of the condition. It recommends investment in dementia research should be maintained at 1.5% of the direct cost of dementia to keep pace with the increasing costs of treatment and care.

By 2030, the total cost to the health care system of dementia is projected to rise to \$8.2 billion and the number of people with dementia to double to more than 460,000.

The report concludes that dementia research in Australia is significantly under funded in relation to other chronic diseases. According to 2003 figures, dementia funding is 50% of research funding for cancer, relative to the current disease burden and 30% of research funding for cardiovascular disease, relative to current direct cost of care.

Professor Henry Brodaty, one of the authors of the report, said, "Australian dementia researchers have an excellent track record not withstanding inadequate funding for dementia research."

"The recent initiatives taken by the Federal Government in establishing three Dementia Collaborative Research Centres and a program of dementia grants are encouraging. However, investment in dementia research falls short of what is needed if more effective medical interventions are to be provided to the ever increasing number of people at risk of dementia or with a diagnosis of dementia", he said.

"There is a strong case for dementia to be recognised by the National Health and Medical Research Council as a National Health Priority Area."

Glenn Rees, National Executive Director of Alzheimer's Australia said, "modelling done by Access Economics shows if the onset of Alzheimer's disease could be delayed by five years, it would result in a 50% reduction of new cases each year with a significant saving to the direct cost of dementia".

He said, "This emphasises the importance of research strategies directed to early diagnosis and identifying those at most risk of dementia. In this way Australians will have earlier access to medications currently being trialled that hold out the prospect of modifying the disease."

Projects like the CSIRO Australian Imaging Biomarker and Lifestyle Flagship Study of Ageing (AIBL) “are a strong indication of the potential of Australian research to make a significant contribution to global research in key areas such as early diagnosis and reducing the risk of dementia,” he said.

“There is a window of opportunity if investment in research is increased. This will address the issues that the growing numbers of people with dementia will pose for the health system within 15 years”.

The authors of the report are Dr Lee-Fay Low, Lisa Gomes and Professor Henry Brodaty at the Dementia Collaborative Research Centre, Assessment and Better Care Outcomes, University of NSW.

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Contact: Kaylia Dunstan on 0407 232 212 for interviews with the authors of the report and Glenn Rees, National Executive Director, Alzheimer’s Australia.