

LAUNCH OF DEMENTIA AWARENESS WEEK 16 SEPTEMBER 2002

Speaking Notes for President

Thank you Minister Andrews. I am particularly delighted to welcome Mrs Janette Howard. Shadow Minister Ms Ellis and distinguished guests.

It is good to have dreams. It is wonderful when they come true.

I could not have foreseen even two years ago that Dementia Awareness Week 2002 would develop such a significant national profile.

We want, quite simply, dementia to be understood. We want the stigma removed and the community to understand that dementia is not an automatic consequence of ageing.

We have in Shelley today a champion athlete. We need too, in Australia, a champion in public life to speak out as President Reagan and Charlton Heston have done.

We urge prominent Australians to speak out publicly about Alzheimer's in their families or that they themselves have it. This will help other Australians in a similar situation realise that they are not alone and to help overcome stigmas.

The availability of Alzheimer medications to temporarily slow for some the progression of the disease and improve quality of life is a positive. It means that science has already given us some hope that in the future more effective medical interventions will be possible. More research is needed to make that happen more quickly. Less than 1 percent of the health costs of dementia care is spent on research in Australia.

The half a million people who will have dementia by the middle of this century deserve that investment.

But we must also live in the present and remember the 160,000 people with moderate to severe dementia and their families and carers for whom medical science will not come quickly enough. For these people our commitment is to work to ensure that society values and supports people living with dementia.

This means ensuring that people as soon as they are diagnosed receive support and help in understanding the progression of the disease and how they need to plan for their futures.

It means community and residential services that have staff trained to provide quality dementia care.

It means ensuring that those who have behaviours of concern are able to access, when they need it, dementia specific care.

The origins of Alzheimer's Australia were built on the efforts of many thousands of carers who could not access services in the community. Much has changed for the better since the early 1980's in dementia care but the growing epidemic means that access to services gets ever more difficult.

We seek Minister, a coordinated approach by Commonwealth and State and Territory Governments that will effectively address the many issues that the growing dementia epidemic presents.

Dementia should be a major health priority within a framework that covers prevention, research, early diagnosis and best practice management to maintain and improve quality of life.

This Dementia Awareness Week 2002 is another important landmark in gaining that recognition.

DAW 2002 has been possible because of the significant support provided by the principal sponsor the Commonwealth Government. I should like to thank to Pfizer and Janssen Cilag who have done so much over the years to assist us with the discretionary funds we need to promote awareness .

The Australian National Museum have helped to make this year special by allowing us to hold our national launch in this wonderful building. And the outstanding exhibition has been made possible by Hills Hoists and the commitment of Helen Karamihos and her team.

Photographic retailers around the country are raising funds to provide vital support for Alzheimer's Australia. "Thanks for the Memories", frame a memory for Alzheimer's, provides an opportunity for the community to support our work by purchasing a magnetic photo frame.

Lastly my thanks to Shelley's employer, Ideas and Directions, for letting her have time away from work.

Please support our vision for a society committed to the prevention of dementia and to the provision of quality dementia care.

Thank you all for being here.